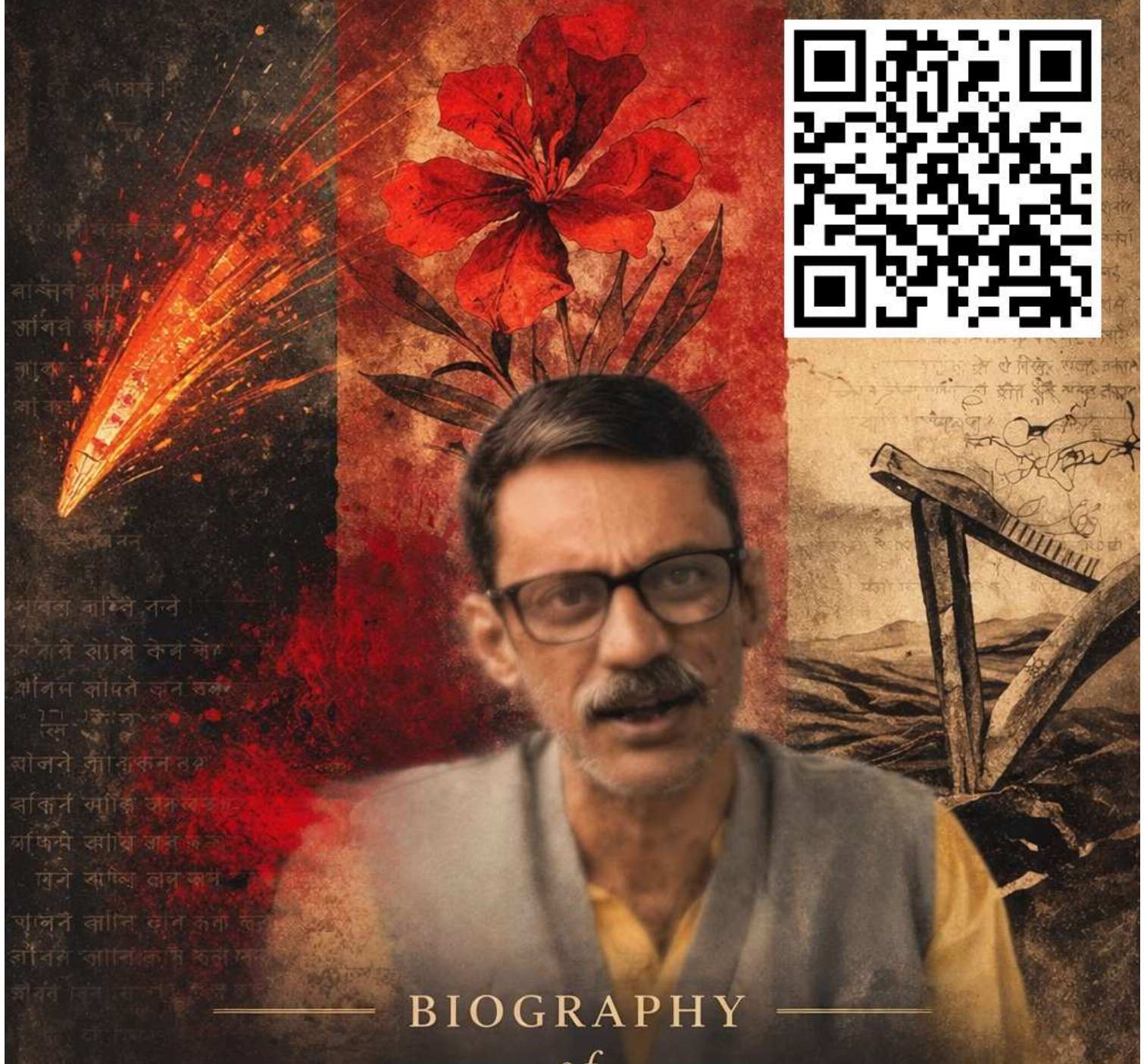




— BIOGRAPHY —
— of —
ABDUL KAFI

Thinking, Language and
the Politics of Knowledge

A BENGALI MARXIST INTELLECTUAL AT JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY

S M NAZMUZ SAKIB

Table of Contents

Copyright Page	23
Part One: Origins, Institutions, and the Architecture of a Mind	24
PREFACE TO PART ONE	24
CHAPTER ONE: THE MAKING OF A BENGALI MARXIST INTELLECTUAL	25
1.1 Who is Abdul Kafi? An Opening Orientation	25
1.2 The Question of Intellectual Formation	26
1.3 The Bengali Intellectual Tradition: A Brief Overview	26
CHAPTER TWO: JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF CRITICAL THOUGHT	28
2.1 A University with a History	28
2.2 The Department of Bengali: Sixty-Eight Years of Intellectual Work	29
2.3 The Centre for Marxian Studies: An Intellectual Forum	29
2.4 Intellectual Geography: Kolkata and the World	31
CHAPTER THREE: PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF KAFI'S THOUGHT	32
3.1 Marxism as Method and as Philosophy	32
3.2 The Gramscian Dimension: Hegemony, Culture, and Intellectuals	33
3.3 Walter Benjamin and the Politics of Memory	34
3.4 The Frankfurt School and Critical Theory	35
3.5 Postcolonial Theory and Its Marxian Critics	36
CHAPTER FOUR: THE NATIONAL BOOK AGENCY AND THE POLITICS OF PUBLICATION	37
4.1 Publishing as Political Practice	37
4.2 The Title and Its Significance: Mrityuke Dak Jibon Pane	38
4.3 The Essay as Form	38
CHAPTER FIVE: DHUMKETU, RAKTAKAROBI, LANGOL: THREE TEXTS AND THE WORLD THEY MADE	39
5.1 The Methodology of Textual Analysis	39
5.2 Dhumketu: The Comet That Set Bengal Ablaze	40

5.3 Raktakarobi: Tagore and the Critique of Industrial Capitalism	41
5.4 Langol: The Plough and the Politics of the Peasantry	43
CHAPTER SIX: LITERARY THEORY AND THE BENGALI CANON.....	44
6.1 What Is Literary Theory and Why Does It Matter?	44
6.2 The Canon Question in Bengali Studies.....	45
6.3 Semiotics, Stylistics, and the Technical Analysis of Literary Texts.....	46
CHAPTER SEVEN: POLITICAL ECONOMY AND CULTURAL THEORY IN BENGAL	46
7.1 The Colonial Economy and Its Cultural Consequences	46
7.2 The Drain of Wealth: Colonial Economics and Intellectual History.....	47
7.3 Class, Caste, and the Limits of Classical Marxism	48
7.4 Gender, Feminism, and the Marxian Tradition	49
CHAPTER EIGHT: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES: BENGALI MARXISM IN GLOBAL CONTEXT.....	50
8.1 Marxism and the Global South: Dependency, World-Systems, and Imperialism	50
8.2 Comparative Literature and the Politics of Language	51
8.3 Brecht and the Bengali Stage	52
8.4 Vivek Chibber and the Universalism Debate	53
CHAPTER NINE: THE POLITICS AND PROBLEMS OF THE CONTEMPORARY INDIAN UNIVERSITY	53
9.1 The University as a Site of Struggle	53
9.2 Academic Freedom and Its Enemies	54
9.3 The Crisis of the Left in West Bengal	55
9.4 Neoliberal University Reforms and Their Consequences.....	56
CHAPTER TEN: PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF INTELLECTUAL LIFE.....	57
10.1 The Psychology of the Committed Intellectual.....	57
10.2 The Politics of Academic Identity.....	57
10.3 Community, Solidarity, and the Intellectual Life	58
CHAPTER ELEVEN: JURISPRUDENCE, LEGAL THEORY, AND THE POLITICS OF RIGHTS	59
11.1 Marxism and the Law.....	59
11.2 The Right to Dissent and Academic Freedom	60
CHAPTER TWELVE: ECONOMICS, POLITICAL ECONOMY, AND THE MATERIAL CONDITIONS OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION.....	60

12.1 The Political Economy of Academic Publishing.....	60
12.2 The Global Knowledge Economy and Its Hierarchies.....	61
CHAPTER THIRTEEN: PEDAGOGY, TEACHING, AND THE FORMATION OF CRITICAL MINDS	62
13.1 Teaching as Political Practice	62
13.2 The Doctoral Student and the Transmission of Tradition	62
CHAPTER FOURTEEN: THE CONCEPT OF THE TEXT AND ITS HISTORY	63
14.1 What is a Text? Theoretical Perspectives	63
14.2 The Crisis of History and the Work of Literature	64
CHAPTER FIFTEEN: TOWARD A SYNTHESIS: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF KAFI'S INTELLECTUAL PROJECT	64
15.1 What Abdul Kafi Represents	64
15.2 The Project of Bengali Literary Criticism	65
15.3 Toward a Humanist Marxism for the Twenty-First Century.....	66
CONCLUSION TO PART ONE: QUESTIONS, PROBLEMS, AND PATHS FORWARD	66
The Shape of the Argument to Come	66
Questions for Discussion and Further Research	67
Suggestions for Further Reading.....	68
APPENDIX TO PART ONE.....	69
A. Note on Sources and Methods.....	69
B. Glossary of Key Terms	69
C. Timeline of Key Events and Dates.....	70
PART TWO: THREE TEXTS AND THE WORLD THEY MADE	71
A Close Reading of Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol.....	71
PREFACE TO PART TWO	72
CHAPTER ONE: THE HISTORICAL MOMENT: BENGAL IN THE 1920s.....	73
1.1 The Aftermath of the Great War.....	73
1.2 The Russian Revolution and Its Indian Resonances	74
1.3 The Economics of Crisis: Colonial Capitalism in the 1920s.....	75
1.4 The Communal Question: Hindu-Muslim Relations in the 1920s.....	75
1.5 The Cultural Ferment of the 1920s	76
CHAPTER TWO: DHUMKETU: THE JOURNALISM OF LIBERATION	77

2.1 The Newspaper as Revolutionary Form	77
2.2 The Political Philosophy of Dhumketu.....	78
2.3 The Editorial Voice: Language, Tone, and Political Effect.....	79
2.4 The Poetry of Dhumketu	79
2.5 The Sedition Trial: Law, Power, and the Production of Martyrdom	80
2.6 Dhumketu and the Limits of Populist Nationalism.....	81
CHAPTER THREE: LANGOL: THE PLOUGH, THE CLASS, AND THE CULTURE.....	82
3.1 The Socialist Press in Colonial India.....	82
3.2 Muzaffar Ahmad and the Organizational Vision	82
3.3 The Language Question in Langol	83
3.4 Song, Poem, and Political Mobilization in Langol	84
3.5 The Peasant Question in Langol	84
3.6 Langol's Legacy: Short Life, Long Shadow.....	85
CHAPTER FOUR: RAKTAKAROBI: TAGORE'S CRITIQUE OF CAPITAL	86
4.1 Tagore and the Marxian Tradition: A Complex Relationship	86
4.2 The Structure and Setting of Raktakarobi	86
4.3 The King and the System: Invisible Power.....	87
4.4 Nandini: The Figure of Counter-Hegemonic Life.....	88
4.5 The Red Oleander: Symbol, Nature, and Resistance.....	89
4.6 The Critique of Fordism: Raktakarobi in Economic Context	89
4.7 The Political Resolution: What Does the Ending Mean?	90
CHAPTER FIVE: READING THREE TEXTS TOGETHER	91
5.1 The Method of Comparative Analysis	91
5.2 Three Theories of Political Communication.....	92
5.3 Three Figures of the Political Subject	93
5.4 Three Understandings of History	94
5.5 The Communal Question Revisited: Three Responses.....	94
CHAPTER SIX: THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR MARXIAN LITERARY CRITICISM95	95
6.1 What Does This Analysis Contribute to Theory?	95
6.2 The Question of Aesthetic Value and Political Commitment.....	96
6.3 Georg Lukacs, Modernism, and the Realism Debate	97
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE LEGACY OF THREE TEXTS	97

7.1 How Dhumketu Changed Bengali Political Culture	97
7.2 Raktakarobi and the Question of Tagore's Radicalism.....	98
7.3 Langol and the Socialist Cultural Tradition.....	98
7.4 The Three Texts in Contemporary Perspective	99
CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS TO PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO READ THESE TEXTS TOGETHER?.....	100
Questions for Discussion and Further Research	100
Suggestions for Further Reading.....	101
PART THREE: THE CENTRE FOR MARXIAN STUDIES, POLITICAL ECONOMY, LEGAL PHILOSOPHY, AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF CRITICAL THOUGHT	102
PREFACE TO PART THREE	102
CHAPTER ONE: THE CENTRE FOR MARXIAN STUDIES: AN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY, 1995 TO THE PRESENT.....	103
1.1 The Founding Moment and Its Significance.....	103
1.2 Building an Intellectual Community: The Early Years.....	104
1.3 Abdul Kafi and the Transition to New Coordination	105
1.4 The Centre in the Current Moment: 2024 and 2025	105
1.5 Theoretical Debates and the Centre's Intellectual Identity.....	106
CHAPTER TWO: PHILOSOPHY OF PRAXIS: FROM HEGEL TO CONTEMPORARY MARXIAN THEORY	107
2.1 The Hegelian Heritage and Its Transformation	107
2.2 Antonio Gramsci and the Philosophy of Praxis	108
2.3 Louis Althusser and the Theory of Ideological State Apparatuses	109
2.4 The Frankfurt School: Critical Theory and Cultural Analysis	109
2.5 Georg Lukacs Revisited: Reification, Totality, and the Literary Form.....	110
2.6 Contemporary Marxian Philosophy: New Directions	111
CHAPTER THREE: POLITICAL ECONOMY, DEVELOPMENT, AND THE COLONIAL LEGACY	112
3.1 The Political Economy of Colonialism: Historical Foundations	112
3.2 Drain of Wealth and the Colonial Economy.....	113
3.3 Amiya Kumar Bagchi and the History of Indian Capitalism	114
3.4 Prabhat Patnaik and the Contemporary Analysis of Capitalism	115
3.5 Samir Amin and the World-Systems Perspective	115

3.6 The Political Economy of Education and the University.....	116
CHAPTER FOUR: LEGAL PHILOSOPHY, JURISPRUDENCE, AND THE CRITIQUE OF LAW	117
4.1 Marxian Legal Theory: Foundational Concepts.....	117
4.2 Evgeny Pashukanis and the Commodity Form Theory of Law.....	118
4.3 Colonial Law and Its Legacy in Postcolonial India.....	118
4.4 B.R. Ambedkar, Caste, and the Limits of Legal Equality.....	119
4.5 Environmental Law, Indigenous Rights, and the Commons	120
4.6 Freedom of Speech, Academic Freedom, and the Law.....	121
CHAPTER FIVE: PSYCHOLOGY, SUBJECTIVITY, AND THE LIFE OF THE MIND	122
5.1 The Psychology of the Intellectual: Self, Work, and World.....	122
5.2 Psychoanalysis and the Social: Freud, Marcuse, and the Cultural Superego	123
5.3 The Social Psychology of Identity: Class, Caste, Religion, and the Muslim Intellectual in Contemporary India	124
5.4 The Psychology of the Attacked: Trauma, Resilience, and Intellectual Continuity	125
5.5 Vocation, Commitment, and the Ethics of Intellectual Work.....	125
CHAPTER SIX: HISTORICAL ANALYSIS AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY.....	126
6.1 History as a Political Problem: The Marxian Approach.....	126
6.2 The Bengali Renaissance and Its Contradictions.....	127
6.3 Partition, Memory, and the Literature of Loss	128
6.4 The History of the Left in Bengal: Achievements and Failures.....	129
6.5 History and the Present: The 2024-2025 Conjuncture	130
CHAPTER SEVEN: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: BENGALI MARXISM IN GLOBAL CONTEXT.....	130
7.1 The Methodology of Comparison	130
7.2 Bengali Marxism and Latin American Critical Theory	131
7.3 Bengali Marxism and African Socialism: Nkrumah, Cabral, and the Cultural Politics of Liberation	132
7.4 The Global South as an Intellectual Category: Recent Developments.....	132
7.5 Postcolonial Theory: Engagement and Critique	133
CHAPTER EIGHT: THE QUESTION OF LANGUAGE: BENGALI, POLITICS, AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF LINGUISTIC DIFFERENCE	134
8.1 Language as a Political Problem.....	134

8.2 The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis and the Bengali Case	135
8.3 The National Language Question and the Politics of Bengali	135
8.4 Translation, Power, and the Circulation of Knowledge	136
CHAPTER NINE: ECONOMIC ANALYSIS, NEOLIBERALISM, AND THE CRISIS OF CONTEMPORARY INDIA	137
9.1 The Neoliberal Turn and Its Indian Variant	137
9.2 The Farm Laws Crisis and the Resurgence of Agrarian Politics	138
9.3 Platform Capitalism and the New Frontiers of Exploitation	138
9.4 Digital Capitalism and the Transformation of Cultural Production	139
CHAPTER TEN: EDUCATION, PEDAGOGY, AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF KNOWLEDGE	140
10.1 The University as an Intellectual Institution: Theory and Practice	140
10.2 The National Education Policy 2020 and Its Implications	141
10.3 Student Politics, Academic Freedom, and the Crisis of the Indian University	141
CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE AESTHETICS OF RESISTANCE: ART, LITERATURE, AND POLITICAL CHANGE IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA	142
11.1 The Question of Political Art	142
11.2 Contemporary Bengali Literature and Its Political Dimensions	143
11.3 Cinema, Television, and the Cultural Politics of the Digital Age	144
CHAPTER TWELVE: FUTURE DIRECTIONS: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES	144
12.1 The Intellectual Agenda for the Next Decade	144
12.2 The Digital Transformation of Scholarship	145
12.3 The Next Generation of Bengali Marxian Scholars	146
12.4 Closing Reflections: What Kafi Represents	146
CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS TO PART THREE: THE ARCHITECTURE OF CRITICAL THOUGHT	147
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH	148
SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING	149
PART FOUR: THE PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE, THE POLITICS OF TRANSLATION, AND THE ARCHIVE OF BENGALI THOUGHT	153
PREFACE TO PART FOUR	153
CHAPTER ONE: WHAT IS LANGUAGE? PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS	154
1.1 The Question of Language as a Philosophical Problem	154

1.2 Saussure and the Structural Analysis of Language	156
1.3 Wittgenstein and the Social Life of Language	157
1.4 Heidegger, Gadamer, and the Hermeneutics of Understanding.....	157
1.5 Sanskrit Linguistic Philosophy: Panini, Bhartrhari, and the Indian Tradition.....	159
1.6 Bakhtin and the Dialogic Imagination	160
CHAPTER TWO: THE POLITICS OF TRANSLATION.....	161
2.1 Translation as a Theoretical Problem	161
2.2 The Colonial Politics of Translation.....	162
2.3 Translation and the Marxian Tradition in Bengal.....	163
2.4 The Translation of Bengali Scholarship into Global Intellectual Conversations.....	163
2.5 Walter Benjamin on the Task of the Translator	164
2.6 Postcolonial Translation Theory: Spivak, Niranjana, and Beyond.....	165
CHAPTER THREE: THE ARCHIVE OF BENGALI THOUGHT	166
3.1 What is an Archive?.....	166
3.2 The Archive of Sanskrit Learning.....	166
3.3 The Persian and Islamic Archive.....	167
3.4 The Colonial Archive and Its Discontents	168
3.5 The Nationalist Archive: The Bengal Renaissance and Its Texts	169
3.6 The Progressive Archive: From IPTA to the Present.....	170
CHAPTER FOUR: THE POLITICS OF LITERARY CANON FORMATION	170
4.1 What Is a Literary Canon?	171
4.2 The Bengali Literary Canon and Its Politics	171
4.3 Oral Tradition, Folk Culture, and the Limits of the Written Archive.....	172
4.4 The Digital Archive and New Possibilities for Bengali Studies.....	173
CHAPTER FIVE: WITTGENSTEIN, FORMS OF LIFE, AND THE POLITICS OF MEANING	173
5.1 Ordinary Language and Extraordinary Claims	173
5.2 Language Games and the University	174
5.3 The Politics of Naming and the Language of Caste, Community, and Class	175
5.4 Metaphor and Political Language	176
CHAPTER SIX: LANGUAGE, POWER, AND EPISTEMIC AUTHORITY	177
6.1 Foucault, Discourse, and the Production of Truth.....	177

6.2 Epistemic Authority and Its Challenges	177
6.3 The Public Intellectual and the Politics of Expertise	178
6.4 Language Ideology and the Politics of Standardization	179
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO BENGALI THOUGHT	180
7.1 New Materialism and the Critique of Linguistic Idealism	180
7.2 Speculative Realism and the Question of Ontology	180
7.3 Critical Realism and the Explanation of Social Structures.....	181
7.4 Analytic Philosophy of Language: Recent Developments	182
CHAPTER EIGHT: LANGUAGE, SILENCE, AND THE UNSPEAKABLE	182
8.1 What Cannot Be Said	183
8.2 The Silence of the Marginalized: Subaltern Studies and Its Limits	183
8.3 Poetry and the Inarticulate: Celan, Nazrul, and the Limits of Expression	184
CHAPTER NINE: SEMIOTICS, SIGNIFICATION, AND THE POLITICS OF THE SIGN ...	185
9.1 Semiotics and Its Founders	185
9.2 The Symbol and the Allegorical Impulse in Bengali Literature	186
9.3 Political Semiotics: How Signs Become Weapons	186
CHAPTER TEN: LANGUAGE PHILOSOPHY, JURISPRUDENCE, AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL DIMENSION	187
10.1 Constitutional Language and Its Interpretation	187
10.2 Language Rights and the Politics of Minority Protection	188
CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS TO PART FOUR: LANGUAGE AS A POLITICAL HORIZON	188
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH	189
SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING	190
PART FIVE: DIALECTICS OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY: BENGALI LITERATURE FROM BANKIMCHANDRA TO THE PRESENT	193
PREFACE TO PART FIVE	194
CHAPTER ONE: BANKIMCHANDRA CHATTOPADHYAY AND THE INVENTION OF BENGALI MODERNITY	194
1.1 The Problem of the Beginning	194
1.2 Bankim's Dilemma: Colonialism, Hinduism, and the Question of National Identity	195
1.3 The Economic Dimensions of Bankimchandra's World	196

1.4 The Legacy of Bankimchandra: A Problem for Future Generations	197
CHAPTER TWO: RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND THE AMBIGUITIES OF UNIVERSALISM.....	198
2.1 Tagore's Global Significance and Local Roots	198
2.2 The Critique of Nationalism: Tagore's Most Controversial Position.....	198
2.3 Raktakarobi: A Play at the Intersection of Tradition and Modernity.....	199
2.4 Tagore, Marxism, and the Question of Labor	200
CHAPTER THREE: KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM, REVOLUTION, AND THE MAKING OF A RADICAL LITERARY POLITICS	201
3.1 Nazrul's Significance in Kafi's Intellectual Universe	201
3.2 Dhumketu: The Comet of Revolution	201
3.3 Langol: Literature and the Labor Movement.....	202
3.4 Nazrul's Religious Universalism and Its Political Implications	203
CHAPTER FOUR: THE PROGRESSIVE WRITERS MOVEMENT AND THE MARXIAN AESTHETICS OF COMMITMENT	204
4.1 The Formation of a Radical Literary Culture	204
4.2 The IPTA and the Transformation of Bengali Theater	204
4.3 Debates Within the Progressive Tradition: Realism, Form, and Politics.....	205
4.4 The Legacy of the Progressive Movement in Contemporary Bengali Literary Culture.....	206
CHAPTER FIVE: PARTITION, MEMORY, AND THE WOUNDS OF HISTORY IN BENGALI LITERATURE	206
5.1 The Partition of 1947 and Its Literary Aftermath.....	206
5.2 The Literature of Witness: Writing About What Cannot Be Said.....	207
5.3 Communal Memory, Historical Truth, and the Politics of Representation.....	208
5.4 The Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 and its Literary Consequences	209
CHAPTER SIX: MANIK BANDYOPADHYAY AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF EXPLOITATION	210
6.1 Manik's Place in the Bengali Literary Tradition.....	210
6.2 The Psychology of Poverty and Exploitation.....	210
6.3 Jibanananda Das and the Inner Life of Bengali Modernity	211
CHAPTER SEVEN: ECONOMIC ANALYSIS AND LITERARY CULTURE: BASE, SUPERSTRUCTURE, AND BEYOND.....	212
7.1 The Problem of Economic Determination in Literary Analysis	212
7.2 Raymond Williams and the Concept of the Long Revolution	212
7.3 The Political Economy of Indian Publishing and Bengali Literary Culture	213

CHAPTER EIGHT: LEGAL, CONSTITUTIONAL, AND JURISPRUDENTIAL DIMENSIONS OF BENGALI INTELLECTUAL CULTURE	214
8.1 Law and Literature as Parallel Forms of Social Knowledge.....	214
8.2 Constitutional Law and the Protection of Language Rights.....	215
8.3 The Law and the University: Institutional Autonomy, Academic Freedom, and State Power ...	216
8.4 Criminal Law, the 2019 Attack, and the Question of Academic Safety	217
CHAPTER NINE: POLITICAL THEORY, DEMOCRACY, AND THE COMMITTED INTELLECTUAL	217
9.1 The Indian Left in the Twenty-First Century: Crisis and Renewal	217
9.2 Gramsci, the Organic Intellectual, and the Role of the Scholar in Political Struggle	218
9.3 The Politics of Secularism in Contemporary India	219
9.4 Populism, Democracy, and the Challenge to Left Politics.....	220
CHAPTER TEN: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES: BENGALI INTELLECTUAL CULTURE IN GLOBAL CONTEXT	220
10.1 Postcolonial Theory and Its Discontents.....	220
10.2 World Literature and the Problem of Peripherality.....	221
10.3 Latin America, Africa, and the Global South: Comparative Intellectual Traditions	222
10.4 The Global Crisis of the Left and the Tasks of Marxian Scholarship	223
CHAPTER ELEVEN: PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE QUESTION OF WHAT LITERATURE IS FOR.....	224
11.1 Literature, Human Nature, and the Claims of Political Philosophy	224
11.2 The Aesthetic and the Political: Can They Be Unified?	224
11.3 Memory, Archive, and the Future of Bengali Literary Culture	225
11.4 Critical Pedagogy, the Classroom, and the Formation of Future Scholars	226
CHAPTER TWELVE: TOWARD A SYNTHESIS: KAFI'S INTELLECTUAL CONTRIBUTION IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE	227
12.1 What Makes a Tradition Live	227
12.2 Kafi's Specific Contribution: Text, History, and Commitment	228
12.3 Recent Developments: The Contemporary Moment in Bengali Marxian Scholarship (2024-2026)	228
12.4 The Future of the Tradition: Problems, Possibilities, and Responsibilities.....	229
CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS TO PART FIVE: THE DIALECTIC AS HISTORICAL FORM	230
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH	232
SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING	233

APPENDIX TO PART FIVE: CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW OF BENGALI LITERARY HISTORY FROM BANKIMCHANDRA TO THE PRESENT	235
PART SIX: THE TEXTS IN DETAIL: A CLOSE READING OF "MRITYUKE DAK JIBON PANE: DHUMKETU, RAKTAKAROBI, LANGOL"	239
PREFACE TO PART SIX	239
PART ONE: READING DHUMKETU.....	240
CHAPTER ONE: THE NEWSPAPER AS LITERARY FORM: DHUMKETU IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT	240
CHAPTER TWO: THE POLITICS OF FIRE: IMAGERY, SYMBOLISM, AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN DHUMKETU.....	244
CHAPTER THREE: NATIONALISM, RELIGION, AND THE BOUNDARIES OF COMMUNITY IN DHUMKETU	247
CHAPTER FOUR: KAFI'S METHODOLOGY: WHAT THE ANALYSIS OF DHUMKETU REVEALS ABOUT HIS SCHOLARLY PRACTICE	250
PART TWO: READING RAKTAKAROBI	252
CHAPTER FIVE: THE WORLD OF YAKSHAPURI: SPACE, POWER, AND DESIRE IN RAKTAKAROBI	252
CHAPTER SIX: DESIRE, FREEDOM, AND THE POLITICS OF EMBODIMENT IN RAKTAKAROBI	256
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE HISTORICAL TAGORE: RAKTAKAROBI IN ITS POLITICAL CONTEXT	258
CHAPTER EIGHT: THE PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF RAKTAKAROBI: WHAT TAGORE BELIEVED ABOUT HUMAN NATURE	261
PART THREE: READING LANGOL	264
CHAPTER NINE: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF LANGOL: CLASS, LAND, AND LABOR IN 1925 BENGAL	265
CHAPTER TEN: LANGUAGE, COMMUNITY, AND POLITICAL IDENTITY IN LANGOL	267
CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE UNITY OF THREE TEXTS: KAFI'S SYNTHETIC ANALYTICAL VISION	270
CHAPTER TWELVE: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TRILOGY: WHAT KAFI'S SCHOLARSHIP CONTRIBUTES TO THE GLOBAL DEBATE	273
CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS TO PART SIX: THE LIVING TEXT AND THE LIVING TRADITION.....	276
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH	277
SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING.....	279
APPENDIX TO PART SIX: TEXTUAL CONCORDANCE OF KEY TERMS ACROSS THE THREE TEXTS.....	280
PART SEVEN: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE INTELLECTUAL: IDENTITY, VOCATION, AND THE INNER LIFE OF POLITICAL COMMITMENT.....	281
PREFACE TO PART SEVEN.....	281

CHAPTER ONE: THE PHILOSOPHY OF VOCATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE CALLED TO THINK?	282
1.1 The Concept of Vocation and Its History	282
1.2 The Marxian Critique of Vocation	283
1.3 Said's Intellectual and the Question of Representation	284
1.4 The Philosophical Dimensions of Teaching as Vocation	286
CHAPTER TWO: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ACADEMIC LIFE: UNDERSTANDING THE CONDITIONS OF INTELLECTUAL WORK	287
2.1 The Crisis of the Humanities in Neoliberal India	287
2.2 Funding, Infrastructure, and the Material Conditions of Research	288
2.3 The Political Economy of Bengali-Language Scholarship	289
CHAPTER THREE: IDENTITY, RELIGION, AND THE POLITICS OF THE SELF	290
3.1 The Problem of Identity in the Bengali Intellectual Tradition	290
3.2 Partition, Memory, and the Wound That Does Not Heal	291
3.3 The Minority Intellectual and the Problem of Double Consciousness	292
3.4 Islam, Marxism, and the Problem of Theoretical Synthesis	292
CHAPTER FOUR: THE EXPERIENCE OF VIOLENCE: THE ASSAULT AND ITS MEANINGS	294
4.1 The Attack of 2019: Facts and Context	294
4.2 The Pattern of Violence Against Academics in Bengal	294
4.3 The Psychological Dimensions of Surviving Violence	295
4.4 The Silencing Effect: Intimidation and Intellectual Freedom	296
CHAPTER FIVE: THE LEGAL AND JURISPRUDENTIAL DIMENSIONS OF ACADEMIC LIFE	297
5.1 The Legal Framework of Academic Freedom in India	297
5.2 Jurisprudential Reflections: Law, Violence, and the Academy	297
5.3 The Institutional Architecture of Academic Governance	298
CHAPTER SIX: THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE BENGALI INTELLECTUAL CLASS: BHADRALOK, CASTE, AND INTELLECTUAL HIERARCHY	299
6.1 The Bhadrlok and Its Discontents	299
6.2 Caste, Class, and the Politics of Academic Inclusion	300
6.3 Gender and the Gendering of Intellectual Work	301

CHAPTER SEVEN: COMPARATIVE PSYCHOLOGY OF LEFT INTELLECTUALS: GLOBAL AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES	302
7.1 The Intellectual and the Party: A Complex Relationship	302
7.2 The Frankfurt School and the Problem of Critical Theory Under Pressure.....	302
7.3 Gramsci's Organic Intellectual in the Twenty-First Century	303
7.4 Said, Spivak, and the Postcolonial Intellectual.....	304
CHAPTER EIGHT: THE PEDAGOGICAL RELATIONSHIP: TEACHING AS POLITICAL PRACTICE.....	305
8.1 The Student-Teacher Relationship in the Bengali Tradition	305
8.2 Paulo Freire and the Pedagogy of the Oppressed: Applications to the Bengali Context ...	306
8.3 The Question of the Difficult Student: Conflict, Authority, and Care	307
8.4 Pedagogy, Care, and the Ethics of the Teacher	307
CHAPTER NINE: THE ECONOMICS AND POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION	308
9.1 Intellectual Labor in the Age of Digital Capitalism	308
9.2 Knowledge as Power: Foucault, Bourdieu, and Academic Hierarchies.....	309
9.3 The National Book Agency and the Political Economy of Left Publishing.....	310
CHAPTER TEN: PHILOSOPHICAL DIMENSIONS OF COMMITMENT: ETHICS, PRAXIS, AND THE GOOD INTELLECTUAL LIFE	311
10.1 What Is Praxis? The Philosophical Concept and Its Bengali Applications	311
10.2 The Aristotelian Tradition: Eudaimonia and the Intellectual Life	312
10.3 Ethics of Intellectual Responsibility: Limits and Obligations.....	312
CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE FUTURE OF THE TRADITION: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES IN 2025 AND BEYOND	313
11.1 The Current Political Landscape and Its Implications for Bengali Marxist Scholarship	313
11.2 The Digital Turn and Bengali Scholarship	314
11.3 New Voices, New Questions: The Next Generation of Bengali Marxist Scholars	315
11.4 The Relevance of Bengali Marxist Literary Scholarship to Global Debates	315
CHAPTER TWELVE: PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE AND INTELLECTUAL INTEGRITY: THE INNER RESOURCES OF THE COMMITTED SCHOLAR	316
12.1 What Is Psychological Resilience in the Academic Context?	316
12.2 The Role of Intellectual Community in Sustaining Scholarly Work.....	317
12.3 Intellectual Integrity and the Refusal of Compromise	317

12.4 Meaning, Purpose, and the Sustaining of Intellectual Life	318
CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS TO PART SEVEN: THE INNER LIFE AND THE OUTER WORLD	319
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH	320
SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING	322
APPENDIX TO PART SEVEN: A PHILOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY OF KEY CONCEPTS ...	323
PART EIGHT: THE COMPARATIVE DIMENSION: SITUATING BENGALI MARXIAN LITERARY SCHOLARSHIP WITHIN WORLD LITERATURE AND WORLD MARXISM....	325
PREFACE TO PART EIGHT	326
CHAPTER ONE: WORLD LITERATURE AND ITS DISCONTENTS: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND THEIR LIMITATIONS.....	327
1.1 Goethe's Weltliteratur and Its Twentieth-Century Heirs	327
1.2 Pascale Casanova and the World Republic of Letters.....	328
1.3 Franco Moretti and Distant Reading: The Problem of Scale.....	329
1.4 David Damrosch and the Circulation of World Literature.....	330
CHAPTER TWO: WORLD MARXISM AND ITS LITERARY TRADITIONS: A COMPARATIVE MAP	331
2.1 The Making of Marxian Literary Theory: From Engels to the Present	331
2.2 The Soviet Tradition and Socialist Realism: A Critical Assessment	332
2.3 The Frankfurt School and Western Marxism: A Different Tradition	333
2.4 Raymond Williams and Cultural Materialism.....	334
CHAPTER THREE: LATIN AMERICAN MARXIAN LITERARY SCHOLARSHIP: A COMPARATIVE ENCOUNTER	335
3.1 The Latin American Context: Dependency Theory and Cultural Analysis	335
3.2 Jose Carlos Mariategui and the Peruvian Tradition	336
3.3 Pablo Neruda, Cesar Vallejo, and the Politics of Poetry	336
3.4 Roberto Fernandez Retamar and the Question of Cultural Identity	337
CHAPTER FOUR: AFRICAN MARXIAN LITERARY SCHOLARSHIP: CONNECTIONS AND CONTRASTS	338
4.1 Negritude and Its Marxian Dimensions	338
4.2 Frantz Fanon and the Wretched of the Earth	339
4.3 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and the Politics of Language.....	339
4.4 Chinua Achebe and the African Novel.....	340

CHAPTER FIVE: CHINESE MARXIAN LITERARY THOUGHT: A SPECIFIC COMPARISON.....	341
5.1 The Chinese Revolutionary Literary Tradition	341
5.2 Lu Xun and the May Fourth Movement.....	341
5.3 Mao's Literary Theory and Its Limitations.....	342
5.4 Contemporary Chinese Literary Theory and Global Engagement.....	343
CHAPTER SIX: ARAB MARXIAN LITERARY THOUGHT: ANOTHER COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE.....	343
6.1 The Arab Cultural Renaissance and Marxian Politics	343
6.2 Palestinian Literary Resistance: Mahmoud Darwish and the Politics of Exile	344
6.3 Adonis and the Question of Modernism in Arabic Literature.....	344
CHAPTER SEVEN: TRANSLATION AND THE POLITICS OF LITERARY CIRCULATION	345
7.1 The Theory of Translation and Its Political Dimensions.....	345
7.2 Tagore in Translation: The Politics of Global Reception.....	346
7.3 The Translation Problem in Marxian Literary Scholarship.....	346
CHAPTER EIGHT: THE QUESTION OF REALISM AND ITS VARIANTS IN WORLD MARXIAN LITERARY THOUGHT	347
8.1 The Realism Debate: A Global Perspective	347
8.2 Bengali Realism and Its Specific Character	348
8.3 Fredric Jameson and the Political Unconscious: Applications and Limitations	349
CHAPTER NINE: IMPERIALISM, WORLD-SYSTEMS THEORY, AND THE POSITION OF BENGALI LITERATURE.....	350
9.1 World-Systems Theory and the Global Literary Hierarchy.....	350
9.2 Samir Amin and Unequal Development: Cultural Implications	350
9.3 The Drain of Wealth and the Drain of Intellectual Resources.....	351
CHAPTER TEN: ECOCRITICISM, DIGITAL HUMANITIES, AND THE FUTURE OF COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS.....	351
10.1 Ecocriticism and the Bengali Environmental Tradition.....	351
10.2 Digital Humanities and the Bengali Archive	352
10.3 Comparative Media Studies and the Analysis of Political Culture	353
CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE TAGORE-NAZRUL AXIS AND THE GLOBAL IMAGINATION OF BENGALI CULTURE	354
11.1 Tagore's Global Reception: What It Reveals and Conceals.....	354

11.2 Nazrul Islam's Global Absence.....	354
11.3 Bangladesh and the Partition of the Bengali Literary Tradition.....	355
CHAPTER TWELVE: TOWARD A NEW COMPARATIVE FRAMEWORK: PROPOSALS AND PROSPECTS	356
12.1 The Inadequacy of Existing Frameworks.....	356
12.2 Elements of a New Framework.....	356
12.3 The Bengali Contribution to Global Intellectual Debates	357
CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS TO PART EIGHT: THE LOCAL, THE GLOBAL, AND THE DIALECTIC OF COMPARISON.....	358
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH	359
SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING	360
APPENDIX TO PART EIGHT: KEY CONCEPTS IN COMPARATIVE WORLD LITERATURE AND MARXIAN CULTURAL THEORY	362
PART NINE: THE FUTURE OF THE TRADITION.....	364
Abdul Kafi, the Next Generation, and the Political and Intellectual Challenges of Bengali Marxism in a Changing World.....	364
PREFACE TO PART NINE	364
CHAPTER ONE: THE CONJUNCTURE AND ITS DEMANDS.....	366
The Historical Moment and What It Requires of Marxian Thought.....	366
1.1 Understanding the Conjuncture: A Gramscian Starting Point.....	366
1.2 Neoliberalism and the Crisis of the University.....	367
1.3 The Language Question in the Current Moment.....	369
1.4 The Challenge of Caste and the Limits of the Classical Marxian Framework.....	370
CHAPTER TWO: INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES AND THE QUESTION OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM	371
The University Under Pressure, the Scholar as Subject.....	371
2.1 The Political Economy of Knowledge in Contemporary India.....	371
2.2 The Assault of 2019 and Its Broader Significance	372
2.3 The Rights and Protections of the Academic Intellectual	374
CHAPTER THREE: THE NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THE MARXIAN TRADITION	375
Gender, Caste, Ecology, and Digital Rights in Dialogue with Classical Frameworks	375
3.1 The Feminist Challenge and the Bengali Marxian Response.....	375

3.2 Ecology and the Metabolic Question	376
3.3 The Anti-Caste Movement and the Theory of Annihilation	377
3.4 Digital Rights and the New Enclosures	379
CHAPTER FOUR: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF INTELLECTUAL VOCATION UNDER PRESSURE.....	380
Commitment, Resilience, and the Inner Life of the Committed Scholar	380
4.1 What Sustains Intellectual Work Under Conditions of Adversity	380
4.2 The Identity Question: Being Muslim, Bengali, and Marxist at Once	381
4.3 Resilience as Theory and Practice	382
CHAPTER FIVE: PEDAGOGY, TRANSMISSION, AND THE NEXT GENERATION	383
How a Tradition Reproduces Itself and Why It Matters	383
5.1 Teaching as Philosophical Practice	383
5.2 The Student as Interlocutor and the Problem of Authority.....	384
5.3 Transmitting a Tradition: The Challenge of the Next Generation.....	385
5.4 Critical Pedagogy in the Bengali Context: An Application.....	386
CHAPTER SIX: THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES AND THE FUTURE OF BENGALI LITERARY SCHOLARSHIP	387
Technological Change, Scholarly Method, and the Politics of the Archive	387
6.1 What the Digital Humanities Offers and What It Threatens.....	387
6.2 The Politics of the Digital Archive.....	388
6.3 Social Media, Academic Discourse, and the Transformation of the Public Sphere.....	389
CHAPTER SEVEN: JURISPRUDENCE, LAW, AND THE POLITICS OF ACADEMIC RIGHTS.....	390
The Legal Framework of Intellectual Freedom in Contemporary India.....	390
7.1 Constitutional Foundations and Their Limits	390
7.2 The Rights of Minority Scholars and the Problem of Equal Protection	391
7.3 The Right to Strike and the Politics of Academic Labor.....	392
CHAPTER EIGHT: POLITICAL ECONOMY AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH.....	393
Imperialism, Development, and the Bengali Marxian Contribution to Economic Theory	393
8.1 The Political Economy Tradition at the Centre for Marxian Studies	393
8.2 Dependency, Development, and the Bengali Experience.....	394
8.3 Imperialism in the Twenty-First Century and its Cultural Dimensions.....	395

CHAPTER NINE: PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS AND THE MARXIAN PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION	396
Dialectics, Materialism, and the Philosophy of Praxis in the Bengali Context.....	396
9.1 Philosophy and Literature: The Question of Mediation	396
9.2 Dialectical Materialism and the Study of Language	397
9.3 The Philosophy of Praxis and the Question of Agency	397
CHAPTER TEN: RENEWAL AND PROSPECT	398
The Future of the Bengali Marxian Tradition in a Changing World	398
10.1 What Renewal Means for an Intellectual Tradition	398
10.2 The Contribution of Abdul Kafi to the Tradition's Renewal.....	399
10.3 The Political Philosophical Legacy: Emancipation and its Conditions.....	400
10.4 Prospects for the Tradition: A Realistic Assessment	401
CHAPTER ELEVEN: COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS	402
Abdul Kafi's Methodology in Global Intellectual Context.....	402
11.1 The Method of Immanent Critique	402
11.2 Comparative Philosophical Traditions: Tagore, Vivekananda, Ambedkar	403
11.3 Post-Structuralism and the Bengali Literary Tradition.....	404
CHAPTER TWELVE: CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS	405
The Meaning of a Life in Thought.....	405
12.1 What an Intellectual Life Means	405
12.2 The Scholarly Text as Historical Document	406
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR PART NINE.....	406
SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING	408
APPENDIX TO PART NINE: KEY CONCEPTS IN THE ANALYSIS OF INTELLECTUAL TRADITIONS AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES	409
A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY AND SCHOLARLY RESPONSIBILITY.....	411
PART TEN: THE COMPLETE LEGACY	411
A Critical Assessment of Abdul Kafi's Contribution to Bengali Intellectual Life, Marxian Scholarship, and the Global South's Engagement with the Human Sciences	411
PREFACE TO PART TEN	412
CHAPTER ONE: THE ARCHITECTURE OF A SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTION.....	412
Mapping the Territory of Abdul Kafi's Intellectual Achievement	412

1.1 The Problem of Assessment in Intellectual Biography	412
1.2 The Three Dimensions of the Contribution	413
1.3 The Textual Achievement: A Deep Assessment	414
CHAPTER TWO: LANGOL AND THE POLITICS OF AGRARIAN REVOLUTION	415
A Deep Reading of Abdul Kafi's Textual Engagement	415
2.1 The Historical Significance of Langol	415
2.2 Abdul Kafi's Analytical Framework for Langol	416
2.3 The Peasantry, the Intelligentsia, and the Problem of Representation	417
CHAPTER THREE: RAKTAKAROBI AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERATION	418
Tagore's Political Aesthetics and the Marxian Interpretation	418
3.1 The Problem of Reading Tagore as a Marxian Text	418
3.2 Nandini as the Figure of Counter-Value	419
3.3 The Theatrical Form and its Political Implications	419
3.4 The Universal and the Particular in Tagore's Political Vision	420
CHAPTER FOUR: DHUMKETU AND THE REVOLUTIONARY IMAGINATION	420
Nazrul Islam's Literary Politics and the Bengal Left	420
4.1 Kazi Nazrul Islam and the Problem of Religious Humanism	420
4.2 The Rhetoric of Dhumketu: Analysis of Political Language	421
4.3 Nazrul and the Question of Communal Harmony	422
CHAPTER FIVE: THE PHILOSOPHICAL DEPTH OF THE MARXIAN LITERARY CRITICAL METHOD	422
Epistemology, Ontology, and the Claims of Criticism	422
5.1 What Marxian Literary Criticism Claims to Know	422
5.2 The Ontology of the Literary Text in Marxian Theory	423
5.3 Dialectics as Method in Literary Analysis	424
CHAPTER SIX: THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF LITERARY PRODUCTION	425
Political Economy, the Publishing Industry, and the Market for Ideas	425
6.1 The Political Economy of Bengali Publishing	425
6.2 The Crisis of Progressive Publishing in the Neoliberal Era	425
6.3 Copyright, Intellectual Property, and the Commons of Bengali Literature	426

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE LEGAL AND JURISPRUDENTIAL DIMENSIONS OF THE TRADITION	427
Rights, Responsibilities, and the Scholar in Society.....	427
7.1 The Intellectual as Citizen: Rights and Duties	427
7.2 Constitutional Interpretation and the Claims of Dissent	428
7.3 International Human Rights Law and Academic Freedom	428
CHAPTER EIGHT: PSYCHOLOGY OF THE INTELLECTUAL AND THE TRADITION OF SELF-UNDERSTANDING	429
Inner Life, Outer Pressure, and the Question of Integrity.....	429
8.1 The Relationship Between Personal Identity and Intellectual Work	429
8.2 Intellectual Integrity and the Temptation of Accommodation	430
8.3 The Long Game of Intellectual Commitment.....	431
CHAPTER NINE: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS	431
The Bengali Marxian Tradition in World Intellectual History	431
9.1 The Place of the Bengali Marxian Tradition in Global Marxism.....	431
9.2 The Bengali Contribution to Third World Marxism	432
9.3 The Question of Eurocentrism and the Bengali Response	433
CHAPTER TEN: THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF SCHOLARLY COMMUNITIES	434
Power, Institution, and the Social Character of Intellectual Production.....	434
10.1 Pierre Bourdieu and the Academic Field.....	434
10.2 Knowledge Production and the Politics of Citation	434
10.3 Intellectual Solidarities and the Counter-Hegemonic Network.....	435
CHAPTER ELEVEN: FINAL ASSESSMENT AND INTELLECTUAL LEGACY	436
What Endures and Why It Matters.....	436
11.1 The Enduring Contributions: A Synthesis	436
11.2 The Limitations: An Honest Assessment	436
11.3 What the Tradition Has Always Known and What It Needs to Learn	437
11.4 The Living Tradition and the Task Ahead	438
CHAPTER TWELVE: THE FUTURE SCHOLAR AND THE TRADITION RENEWED	438
Advice, Method, and the Continuation of Inquiry.....	438
12.1 To the Student of the Tradition	439

12.2 A Methodological Toolkit for Bengali Marxian Literary Analysis	439
12.3 The Tradition as a Living Practice	440
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR PART TEN	441
SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING	443
GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR THE COMPLETE TEXTBOOK.....	444
APPENDIX: A NOTE ON SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY	445

Copyright Page

Title: Biography of Abdul Kafi: Thinking, Language and The Politics of Knowledge

Author: S M Nazmuz Sakib

Self-published

Copyright © 2026 S M Nazmuz Sakib

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19490654

This work is licensed under a **Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0)**. You are free to:

- Share: copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format
- Adapt: remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially

under the following term: **Attribution**. You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

Full license: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Disclaimer: This textbook is a work of scholarly analysis and interpretation. It is based on publicly available information regarding Dr. Abdul Kafi's professional career, institutional roles, and published scholarship. The interpretations, analyses, and assessments presented herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Dr. Abdul Kafi, Jadavpur University, or the Centre for Marxian Studies.

First Published: 2026

Part One: Origins, Institutions, and the Architecture of a Mind

PREFACE TO PART ONE

This textbook is designed as a rigorous, multidisciplinary, and deeply engaging study of the life, thought, institutional work, and philosophical contributions of Dr. Abdul Kafi, Assistant Professor in the Department of Bengali at Jadavpur University, Kolkata, and Coordinator of the Centre for Marxian Studies at the same institution. The text is organized into ten parts, and the present volume constitutes the first of those parts. It is written for students of literature, philosophy, cultural theory, political economy, history, and the social sciences who wish to understand not only a single scholar but through that scholar the rich, contested, and deeply significant intellectual world of Bengali academia, Marxian thought, postcolonial theory, and the political philosophy of the global South in the twenty-first century.

A textbook of this kind requires a certain methodological explanation at the outset. We are not writing a conventional biography. Nor are we writing a simple survey of literary criticism. What we are attempting is something more ambitious and more unusual: a critical portrait of a thinker who works at the intersection of several disciplines, several traditions, and several historical pressures, and who does so within one of the most intellectually storied universities on the Indian subcontinent. To understand Abdul Kafi means to understand Jadavpur University and its distinctive intellectual culture. To understand that culture means to understand the history of Bengal, the trajectory of Marxism in South Asia, the crisis of the colonial university, and the ongoing debates about language, literature, politics, and emancipation that have defined Indian intellectual life for more than a century.

The approach taken in this textbook is therefore both biographical and theoretical. We move outward from the person to the institution, from the institution to the discipline, from the discipline to the philosophy, and from the philosophy to the world. At each stage, we attempt to illuminate not merely what Abdul Kafi has thought and done but why it matters, what it connects to, what problems it addresses, and what challenges it continues to face. We draw on the latest developments in Marxian theory, postcolonial studies, literary criticism, political philosophy, cultural history, and the sociology of knowledge. We do so not to overwhelm the reader with jargon but to equip the reader with the tools necessary to engage seriously with the texts and questions at stake.

It is worth noting at the start that Abdul Kafi works in a tradition of Bengali intellectual life that is simultaneously local and global, rooted in the specific history of West Bengal and the subcontinent and yet deeply engaged with international conversations in Marxism, critical theory, literary studies, and political philosophy. This dual character is itself philosophically interesting. It raises fundamental questions about the relationship between particularity and universality, between local struggles and global systems, between the specific language of a people and the abstract categories of theoretical analysis. These are questions that run through all of Abdul Kafi's known work and institutional commitments, and they will run through this textbook as well.

The present Part One covers the following broad areas: the historical and intellectual context of Jadavpur University and its Bengali Department, the biography and formation of Abdul Kafi as a scholar, the Centre for Marxian Studies and its significance, the philosophical traditions that shape his thought, a deep analysis of his published work with reference to the three texts around which his best-known book is organized, the broader question of Marxism and Bengali literature, comparative analysis situating his work in global intellectual debates, the political and institutional pressures that shape academic life in contemporary India, and the psychological dimensions of scholarly identity and intellectual vocation.

Each chapter is designed to be read on its own as a self-contained intellectual essay, but each also contributes to the larger portrait that the book as a whole attempts to construct. Questions for discussion and suggestions for further reading are provided at the end of each chapter.

CHAPTER ONE: THE MAKING OF A BENGALI MARXIST INTELLECTUAL

1.1 Who is Abdul Kafi? An Opening Orientation

There are scholars who are famous because they produce a large body of published work that circulates widely across many countries and languages. There are others whose fame rests on a single breakthrough book that changes the conversation in a field. And then there are scholars whose significance lies not primarily in the volume of their publications but in what they represent, in what they do, in the intellectual tradition they carry and develop, in the institution they help to build, and in the problems they take seriously over a long career of thought and teaching. Abdul Kafi is, in the most meaningful sense, a scholar of this third type. His significance cannot be measured simply by counting citations or assessing the commercial success of his books. It must be measured by understanding the intellectual ecology in which he operates and the work that ecology performs in the broader life of ideas in India and the world.

What we know about Abdul Kafi from public record is the following. He is a male scholar who has been serving as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Bengali at Jadavpur University, located on Raja S.C. Mallick Road, Kolkata, West Bengal, since 2005. He holds a doctorate, reflected in the "Dr." title used in his institutional profile. He is the current Coordinator of the Centre for Marxian Studies at Jadavpur University, a position that places him at the center of one of the most intellectually vibrant interdisciplinary forums on the Indian subcontinent. He has published essays in Bengali that engage with the intersection of Marxist theory and literary history, most notably a book published by the National Book Agency (NBA), one of India's most historically significant left-wing publishing houses, titled in transliteration "Mrityuke Dak Jibon Pane Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, Langol," which can be rendered in English as something approaching "Summoning Death Toward Life: Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, Langol." He is also noted for organizing student-facing cultural events including what is recorded as the Sishu-kishore Utsav, a festival for children and young people.

In 2019, he was the victim of a physical assault by a former postgraduate student of the Bengali department who had harbored grievances and had been stalking and threatening him for some

time. This incident, widely reported in the Indian press, illuminated aspects of the social and political environment of academic life in contemporary Kolkata. We will return to this episode later in the context of our discussion of the politics and pressures of the contemporary Indian university.

These are the verifiable facts. But the significance of Abdul Kafi as an intellectual and as an academic is far larger than these facts alone suggest. To understand why, we must begin by understanding the institution within which he works and the intellectual tradition out of which he has emerged.

1.2 The Question of Intellectual Formation

Every thinker is formed by a history that precedes their own birth. The ideas one inherits, challenges, transforms, and transmits are never simply one's own. They come from a lineage, a tradition, a set of debates already underway when one arrives. For a Bengali intellectual working at Jadavpur University in the early twenty-first century, that lineage is extraordinarily rich and extraordinarily complex. It includes the Bengali Renaissance of the nineteenth century, the revolutionary movements of the colonial period, the establishment of Marxism as a major intellectual and political force in Bengal, the trauma of partition, the struggles of the postcolonial state, and the ongoing crisis of the left in the era of neoliberal globalization. To appreciate Abdul Kafi as a thinker, we must understand at least the broad outlines of this history, because his work cannot be separated from it.

The Department of Bengali at Jadavpur University began its work in 1956, just one year after the university itself was formally established. But the intellectual tradition it draws on is far older. Bengali literary culture stretches back centuries, and the encounter of that culture with modernity, colonialism, nationalism, and Marxism produced some of the most significant literary and philosophical work in the world. When Rabindranath Tagore won the Nobel Prize in 1913, he was recognized not merely as a poet but as the representative of an entire civilization's encounter with modernity. When the Indian People's Theatre Association and the Progressive Writers' Association emerged in the 1930s and 1940s, they represented the crystallization of a Marxist cultural politics that would reshape Bengali literature and thought for generations. When partition came in 1947 and again in 1971, it shattered communities and created new demands on literature to bear witness, to mourn, to analyze, and to resist.

Abdul Kafi has been formed within this tradition. His position in the Bengali department at Jadavpur, his coordination of the Centre for Marxian Studies, his choice of texts for his major published essay collection, all of these signal a scholar who is deeply immersed in the long history of Bengali intellectual life and who is committed to understanding that history through the lens of Marxian critique. His work is not antiquarian. It is not a nostalgic recovery of a lost past. It is, rather, an attempt to use the resources of the past to understand and intervene in the present. This is what makes him representative of a living intellectual tradition rather than merely a custodian of a dead one.

1.3 The Bengali Intellectual Tradition: A Brief Overview

To understand Abdul Kafi's work, we need to say something more sustained about the tradition he works within. Bengali intellectual culture is one of the most distinctive and productive in the world. It has generated thinkers, writers, political philosophers, and cultural theorists of global significance across a period of more than two centuries. The names are numerous: Rammohan Roy, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, Subramaniam Bharati, Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay, Manik Bandyopadhyay, Ritwik Ghatak, Satyajit Ray, Sumit Sarkar, Partha Chatterjee, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Dipesh Chakrabarty. The list goes on, and it includes economists, historians, filmmakers, literary critics, political philosophers, and scientists as well as novelists, poets, and playwrights.

What is distinctive about this tradition? Several things can be said with confidence. First, it has always been deeply engaged with the question of what modernity means for a society shaped by colonialism. From Rammohan Roy's engagement with Western liberalism and Indian reform to Tagore's complex critique of nationalism, from Bankimchandra's construction of a Hindu nationalist modernity to Nazrul's Muslim revolutionary universalism, Bengali intellectual culture has been obsessed with the encounter between tradition and modernity, between local particularity and universal aspiration. This obsession has produced both extraordinary creativity and painful contradictions.

Second, the Bengali intellectual tradition has been marked by a deep engagement with the question of class. Unlike many other regional intellectual traditions in India, Bengali intellectual culture developed a significant Marxist wing from a relatively early date. The Communist Party of India had its origins partly in Bengal, and the influence of Marxist ideas on Bengali literature, theater, visual art, and film from the 1930s onward was immense. The Progressive Writers' Association brought figures like Premchand, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, and Mulk Raj Anand into dialogue with Bengali writers. The Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) transformed the way that culture was thought about in relation to political struggle. And Kolkata's long history of left-wing government gave Marxist ideas a kind of institutional legitimacy in the state that they did not enjoy elsewhere in India.

Third, the Bengali intellectual tradition has been marked by a complex relationship with the question of religion, community, and identity. The partition of Bengal in 1947 divided communities that had lived together for centuries along religious lines, and the experience of partition left deep wounds in the cultural fabric of Bengal that have never fully healed. Muslim Bengali intellectuals like Abdul Kafi work in a tradition that has always had to navigate between the demands of a secular, universalist Marxism and the realities of communal identity in a society shaped by partition and its continuing aftershocks. This navigation is not merely personal or biographical. It is fundamentally theoretical. What does it mean to be a Muslim, a Bengali, a Marxist, a literary scholar, and an Indian academic all at once? What is the relationship between these different identity positions? How do they conflict, how do they reinforce each other, and how do they inform the kind of intellectual work one does?

These questions are not merely rhetorical. They structure the intellectual landscape within which Abdul Kafi has worked and continues to work. They are questions that his scholarship, his institutional role, and his very presence in the Bengali department of Jadavpur University all address, even when they are not explicitly discussed.

CHAPTER TWO: JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF CRITICAL THOUGHT

2.1 A University with a History

Jadavpur University is not like other Indian universities. It has a distinctive history, a distinctive culture, and a distinctive intellectual identity that set it apart even from other elite Indian institutions. To understand this distinctiveness is to understand something important about the kind of thinking that Abdul Kafi's career at Jadavpur represents.

The university was established on 24 December 1955, but its roots go back to 1906, to the Bengal Technical Institute that was founded as part of the Swadeshi movement's effort to create an indigenous, nationalist alternative to colonial education. The founding of Bengal Technical Institute was an act of political resistance. It was a refusal of the colonial claim that Indians could only receive knowledge on terms set by the British. It was an assertion that Indians could organize, fund, and operate their own institutions of higher learning. This founding moment left a permanent mark on the university's culture. Jadavpur has always had a sense of itself as an institution with a political mission, not merely an educational one.

As of 2025, Jadavpur University has been ranked 9th among Indian universities in the NIRF rankings, first among state public universities, and has received an A+ grade from NAAC with a CGPA of 3.46. The Nature Index ranked it first among universities in India in terms of research output for 2023-2024. These are remarkable achievements for a public university in a state government that has not always been well-funded. They speak to the quality of the faculty, the seriousness of the research culture, and the strength of the intellectual traditions that the university sustains.

But the significance of Jadavpur cannot be captured by rankings alone. What makes it distinctive is the culture of intellectual freedom, political engagement, and critical inquiry that has historically characterized the institution. Jadavpur has been a place where students and faculty have felt free to challenge authority, to organize politically, to experiment with ideas, and to take intellectual risks. This culture has produced extraordinary scholars and extraordinary controversies. It has also produced, at times, extraordinary conflicts and institutional crises.

The Faculty of Arts at Jadavpur is particularly significant for our purposes. It houses departments of Bengali, Comparative Literature, English, History, Philosophy, Political Science, and several other disciplines, along with several interdisciplinary centers including the Centre for Marxian Studies, the Centre for Canadian Studies, the Centre for Latin American Studies, and others. The interdisciplinary character of the faculty reflects a vision of knowledge that is holistic rather than narrowly specialized, that sees connections across disciplines rather than erecting walls between them. This vision is itself philosophically significant. It reflects an understanding of intellectual work as fundamentally engaged with the world rather than merely with its own disciplinary problems.

2.2 The Department of Bengali: Sixty-Eight Years of Intellectual Work

The Department of Bengali at Jadavpur University began its work in 1956. Its founding generation of teachers included figures of enormous intellectual significance in Bengali cultural life: Sushil Kumar De, one of the most important historians of Bengali literature; Debipada Bhattacharya, a significant scholar of Sanskrit and Bengali poetics; Ajit Kumar Dutta, a poet and critic; Suresh Chandra Maitra, a philosopher-critic; Sankha Ghosh, who would go on to become one of the most celebrated poets and literary critics in the Bengali language; and Alokranjan Dasgupta, another major poet and critic who would later have a significant international career in Germany.

The presence of working poets and writers in the department's founding generation is not incidental. It reflects a vision of Bengali studies that sees literature not as a dead archive to be catalogued but as a living practice to be engaged. Poets like Sankha Ghosh and Alokranjan Dasgupta brought to their teaching not only scholarly knowledge but the sensibility of creative practitioners who understood literature from the inside. This tradition of combining scholarship with creative practice has continued to shape the department's culture over the decades, and it is part of what makes the department's approach to literary study distinctive.

The curriculum of the department today includes areas that reflect the development of the field over the past half-century: literary theory, popular literature, the literature of Bangladesh, partition literature, stylistics, semiotics, and Chomskyan generative grammar. This breadth of focus is itself theoretically significant. The inclusion of Bangladeshi literature reflects a refusal to accept the political borders drawn in 1947 as the boundaries of Bengali cultural life. Partition may have divided the nation, but Bengali literature and Bengali language cross those borders, and a serious Bengali studies program cannot pretend otherwise. The inclusion of partition literature as a specific area of focus reflects the department's commitment to understanding the historical trauma that has shaped Bengali culture in the second half of the twentieth century and beyond. The inclusion of semiotics and literary theory reflects the department's engagement with the international developments in critical theory that transformed literary studies globally in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

Abdul Kafi's work in this department is situated within all of these areas of concern. His Marxian orientation connects to the long tradition of leftist literary criticism in Bengal. His engagement with texts like *Raktakarobi* and *Dhumketu* connects to the intersection of literature and political struggle that has always been central to Bengali literary culture. His coordination of the Centre for Marxian Studies connects to the interdisciplinary, politically engaged character of Jadavpur's Faculty of Arts.

2.3 The Centre for Marxian Studies: An Intellectual Forum

The Centre for Marxian Studies (CMS) at Jadavpur University deserves extended discussion, because it is the institutional setting within which much of Abdul Kafi's most significant intellectual work takes place. The Centre was established in 1998, on the 150th anniversary of the publication of the *Communist Manifesto*. This founding date is itself philosophically significant. The *Manifesto*, first published in 1848, had declared that a specter was haunting

Europe. By 1998, that specter had haunted the entire world, inspired revolutions, shaped states, animated liberation movements, and generated one of the richest bodies of political and philosophical theory in modern intellectual history. The founding of the Centre in the anniversary year was an act of intellectual commitment: a statement that Marxism remained relevant, that its methods and concepts continued to illuminate the world, and that serious scholarly work in the Marxian tradition needed institutional support.

The founding Coordinator of the Centre was Professor Debesh Chakraborty from the Department of Economics, which is itself significant. A Centre for Marxian Studies housed in the Faculty of Arts but founded by an economist reflects an understanding of Marxism that is genuinely interdisciplinary. Marx himself, of course, was not a disciplinary specialist. He was a philosopher, an economist, a historian, a sociologist, and a political theorist all at once. His method of dialectical materialism cuts across disciplinary lines, connecting the analysis of economic structures to the critique of ideology, the study of history to the analysis of culture, the philosophy of praxis to the theory of political organization. A Centre that brings together scholars from different disciplines to engage with Marxian ideas in this broad sense is truer to the spirit of Marx's own project than any narrowly disciplinary study could be.

Under Abdul Kafi's coordination, the Centre has continued to pursue this interdisciplinary vision. The scholars who have participated in its seminars read like a roll call of some of the most important left-wing intellectuals in the world. They include economists of global significance: Amiya Kumar Bagchi, whose work on colonial underdevelopment and the history of capitalism in India has been deeply influential; Prabhat Patnaik, one of the foremost Marxist economists in India; Utsa Patnaik, whose analysis of colonialism and the drain of wealth from India has challenged conventional economic historiography; and Samir Amin, the Egyptian-French economist whose world-systems perspective and theory of unequal exchange have been foundational in the debates about development and imperialism in the global South.

They also include historians of the caliber of Irfan Habib, whose work on the Mughal economy and the agrarian history of medieval India represents a towering achievement of Marxian historiography; Sumit Sarkar, whose histories of modern India and the Bengal Renaissance have been central to the understanding of Indian nationalism and colonial culture; and Sobhanlal Datta Gupta, a major historian of the Communist International and its Indian connections.

Among literary and cultural critics, the Centre has welcomed Aijaz Ahmad, whose critique of Third World literature and postcolonial theory in his book "In Theory" generated one of the most important debates in postcolonial studies in the 1990s; Himani Bannerji, the Canadian-Bengali scholar whose work on the intersection of Marxism, feminism, and anti-racist politics has been internationally influential; Modhumita Roy, who has worked on questions of gender and development in postcolonial South Asia; and Vivek Chibber, the American Marxist sociologist whose critique of postcolonial theory in "Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital" has reopened fundamental debates about the relationship between Marxism and the study of colonialism.

From outside the academy, the Centre has engaged with figures like Craig Brandist, whose work on the Bakhtin Circle and the philosophy of language connects the Russian tradition of Marxian

cultural theory to current questions in literary studies; and Vijay Prashad, the historian and public intellectual whose work spans Indian history, African liberation movements, and contemporary global politics.

This roster of participants tells us something important about the intellectual profile of the Centre and, by extension, about the kind of thinker Abdul Kafi is as its Coordinator. The Centre is not a narrow or sectarian Marxist forum. It is genuinely open to the range of debates within Marxian thought, from classical political economy to cultural criticism, from orthodox historical materialism to more heterodox engagements with questions of gender, race, and postcoloniality. It is internationalist in its orientation while remaining grounded in the specific concerns of Bengal and India. It takes seriously both theory and history, both abstract philosophical questions and concrete political analysis. These characteristics are not accidental. They reflect the intellectual formation and the scholarly commitments of the person who has been shaping it.

2.4 Intellectual Geography: Kolkata and the World

Jadavpur University sits in South Kolkata, in the neighborhood of Jadavpur, close to the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass. But its intellectual geography extends far beyond its physical location. Kolkata itself is a city with an extraordinary intellectual history, and that history forms the backdrop against which any understanding of the academic culture of Jadavpur must be set.

Kolkata was, for much of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the capital of British India. As the seat of colonial power, it was also the site of the most intense encounter between Indian intellectual culture and the forces of colonial modernity. The Bengal Renaissance, the Brahmo Samaj, the nationalist movement, the rise of industrial capitalism, the development of a Bengali literary culture of extraordinary depth and richness, the growth of the Communist movement, all of these happened in Kolkata and its surrounding region. The city has been, in the phrase that the Bengali historian Sumit Sarkar has used, a "centre of cultural ferment" for more than two centuries.

The partition of Bengal in 1947, combined with the partition of India and the violence that accompanied it, transformed Kolkata in profound and painful ways. The city absorbed millions of refugees from East Bengal (which became East Pakistan and later Bangladesh), and this influx of displaced people transformed its demography, its culture, and its politics. The Left Front government, which came to power in West Bengal in 1977 and held power for thirty-four years until 2011, gave Kolkata's left-wing intellectual culture a degree of institutional support and political legitimacy that shaped the development of academic institutions, publishing houses, and cultural organizations across the state.

The National Book Agency, which published Abdul Kafi's book, is a direct product of this history. Founded in 1939 by Muzaffar Ahmad, one of the founding figures of the Communist Party of India, and his associates, the NBA has been for more than eighty years one of the most important publishers of Marxist and progressive literature in the Bengali language. Its publication of Abdul Kafi's work signals that his scholarship belongs to this tradition of engaged, politically committed intellectual work. It is not a peripheral or marginal placement. It is a placement at the center of one of the most significant left-wing intellectual institutions in Bengal.

CHAPTER THREE: PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF KAFI'S THOUGHT

3.1 Marxism as Method and as Philosophy

To understand the philosophical foundations of Abdul Kafi's intellectual work, we must begin with Marxism, not as a political program or a set of doctrinal commitments but as a philosophical method and a set of analytical tools for understanding the world. This distinction is crucial. Marxism in the academic context of the Centre for Marxian Studies at Jadavpur is not primarily a matter of party allegiance or political activism, though the scholars involved are not indifferent to political questions. It is, rather, a set of intellectual resources for analyzing history, culture, economy, and society.

What is Marxism as a philosophical method? At its core, it is a form of dialectical materialism. The term "dialectical" comes from the Hegelian tradition. Hegel had argued that the development of history, knowledge, and consciousness proceeds through a process of contradiction and resolution: thesis generates antithesis, and the conflict between them produces a synthesis that supersedes both while preserving their most significant elements in a new and higher form. Marx took this dialectical method from Hegel but turned it, in his famous phrase, "right side up." For Hegel, the dialectic was fundamentally a movement of ideas, of Spirit realizing itself in history. For Marx, the dialectic was fundamentally a movement of material forces, of real human beings engaged in the production and reproduction of their material lives.

The term "materialism" in Marx's philosophy does not mean simply that physical matter is all there is. It means something more specific and more interesting: that the foundation of social life, and therefore of all human consciousness and culture, is the organization of material production. The way that human beings produce and distribute the goods necessary for their survival, their tools, their labor, their social relations of production, forms the economic base or infrastructure upon which the legal, political, and cultural superstructure of society is built. This does not mean that culture is simply a passive reflection of economic forces. The relationship between base and superstructure is more complex, more dynamic, and more contradictory than any simple reflection theory would suggest. But it does mean that cultural forms, including literature, cannot be understood in isolation from the economic and social conditions within which they are produced.

For a scholar of Bengali literature working in this tradition, this has profound methodological implications. It means that Bengali literary texts cannot be understood simply in terms of their aesthetic properties or their place in a purely literary tradition. They must be understood in relation to the historical conditions of their production: the economic structures of colonial and postcolonial Bengal, the class relations that shaped the social position of writers and readers, the political struggles that gave certain texts their urgency and their meaning, and the ideological functions that literature served in the reproduction or contestation of social power.

This is not a reductive or mechanical approach to literature. The best Marxian literary criticism, as represented by figures from Georg Lukacs to Raymond Williams to Terry Eagleton to Fredric

Jameson, is deeply attentive to the specific aesthetic qualities of literary texts, to their formal complexity, their narrative structures, their use of language and imagery. What distinguishes Marxian literary criticism from purely aesthetic approaches is not a failure of attention to the formal dimension of literature but a insistence that formal choices are themselves socially and historically significant, that the way a text is organized reflects and responds to the social contradictions of its historical moment.

3.2 The Gramscian Dimension: Hegemony, Culture, and Intellectuals

One of the most important developments within the Marxian tradition for understanding the kind of work that Abdul Kafi does is the contribution of Antonio Gramsci, the Italian communist theorist whose Prison Notebooks, written during his imprisonment by Mussolini's fascist government in the 1930s, transformed the way Marxists think about culture, ideology, and the role of intellectuals.

Gramsci's most significant theoretical innovation is the concept of hegemony. The concept is complex and has been interpreted in many different ways, but its core insight can be stated simply: the domination of a ruling class is maintained not only by direct physical coercion but by the achievement of cultural and ideological leadership. A ruling class achieves hegemony when it succeeds in presenting its own particular interests as the general interests of society, when the values, assumptions, and worldview that serve its interests come to seem like natural, obvious, inevitable truths to the broader population. Hegemony is maintained through what Gramsci called "civil society," the complex network of cultural, educational, religious, and other institutions through which a dominant group establishes and maintains its intellectual and moral leadership.

The implications of this concept for the analysis of culture and literature are far-reaching. It means that literary texts are not politically neutral aesthetic objects. They are, in varying degrees, sites of ideological struggle, places where hegemonic values are affirmed, contested, subverted, or transformed. A novel does not simply tell a story. It makes assumptions about what is natural and what is unnatural, what is possible and what is impossible, what is desirable and what is repellent. These assumptions reflect and reinforce (or challenge) the ideological framework within which the novel is produced and read.

For Gramsci, intellectuals play a crucial role in the processes of hegemony and counter-hegemony. He distinguished between "traditional" intellectuals, who present themselves as autonomous from class interests and whose role is to maintain existing cultural institutions and their authority, and "organic" intellectuals, who are organically connected to a class and serve to articulate that class's worldview, to give it coherence and direction, to help it understand its own interests and the broader social situation within which it finds itself. The question of what kind of intellectual one should be, and in what relationship to which social forces, is one that runs through all of Gramsci's thought.

Abdul Kafi, as a Marxian literary scholar and the Coordinator of the Centre for Marxian Studies, is clearly positioned in the tradition of the organic intellectual. His work is not an attempt to rise above the conflicts of social life into a purely contemplative neutrality. It is an attempt to use the

tools of critical theory and literary analysis in the service of understanding and potentially transforming the conditions of social life. This is not a narrowly political or propagandistic project. It is an intellectual one, requiring the highest standards of scholarship, argumentation, and interpretive rigor. But it is an intellectual project that is explicitly committed to the emancipatory possibilities that Marxian analysis has always sought to illuminate.

3.3 Walter Benjamin and the Politics of Memory

Another major figure whose influence can be felt in the kind of intellectual work that Abdul Kafi pursues, though perhaps less directly than Gramsci, is Walter Benjamin, the German-Jewish Marxian cultural critic whose work in the 1920s and 1930s explored the relationships between history, memory, culture, and political emancipation.

Benjamin is a complex and sometimes enigmatic thinker, but several of his ideas are particularly relevant here. His concept of the dialectical image, drawn from his massive unfinished work on nineteenth-century Paris known as the Arcades Project, holds that historical understanding involves not a linear narrative of progress but a sudden, illuminating encounter between the present and a repressed or forgotten moment of the past. Genuine historical insight, for Benjamin, is like a flash of lightning that reveals connections invisible in the normal light of day. History is not a continuous development toward the present but a discontinuous, fragmentary, and contested terrain in which the oppressed of earlier generations make demands on the present.

This understanding of history has profound implications for the study of literature. A text from the past is not simply a document of its time, to be understood in its own terms and then set aside. It is, in Benjamin's phrase, a "monad" that contains within it the entire historical force field of its moment, and that force field continues to vibrate in the present. When we read a text from colonial Bengal, we are not simply reading a historical artifact. We are encountering a set of forces, conflicts, and possibilities that have not been resolved, that continue to shape our present, that make claims on our understanding and our action.

Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," written in 1940 just before his death, articulates this understanding in its most concentrated form. Against the dominant traditions of historical thought, whether liberal progressivism or vulgar Marxist determinism, Benjamin insists that history is a catastrophe, not a progress. The historical materialist, he argues, must "brush history against the grain," must recover the experience of the defeated, the silenced, and the forgotten, must refuse the triumphalist narratives of the victors. This is a deeply political as well as philosophical position. It means that the study of history and of historical literature is always also a political act, a decision about whose stories matter and whose suffering deserves to be remembered.

For a scholar working in the Bengali tradition on texts like *Dhumketu* and *Raktakarobi*, both of which are deeply engaged with the relationship between cultural production and political struggle in colonial Bengal, this Benjaminian perspective offers important resources. The question is not simply what these texts meant in their historical moment but what they continue to mean, what possibilities they preserve, what demands they make on the present. This is one

way of understanding what it means to approach literature through a dialectical materialist method.

3.4 The Frankfurt School and Critical Theory

The Frankfurt School of critical theory, associated with figures like Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and, in a later generation, Jurgen Habermas, represents another major tributary of the tradition within which Abdul Kafi's work situates itself. The Frankfurt School emerged in Germany in the 1930s as an attempt to develop a critical theory of society that could understand the failure of the working-class revolutions that Marx had predicted and the rise of fascism that had instead occurred. Their project combined Marxian political economy with Freudian psychoanalysis, Weberian sociology, and aesthetic theory to produce a far-reaching critique of modern culture and modern rationality.

Several Frankfurt School concepts are particularly relevant to the analysis of literature and culture that the Centre for Marxian Studies at Jadavpur pursues. Adorno and Horkheimer's concept of the "culture industry," developed in their 1944 *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, holds that under conditions of advanced capitalism, culture becomes a form of industrial production designed to produce conformity, passive consumption, and ideological submission rather than genuine aesthetic experience or critical consciousness. This concept has been enormously influential in the analysis of mass media and popular culture, even if it has also been criticized for its elitism and its failure to account for the ways that mass culture can also be a site of resistance and creative appropriation.

Marcuse's concept of "one-dimensional society," developed in his 1964 book of that name, argues that advanced industrial society has developed the capacity to absorb and neutralize all forms of opposition and critique, to incorporate them into the system as commodified cultural products that reproduce rather than challenge the existing order. The idea that literature and culture can serve as instruments of liberation is, on this view, always under the threat of being transformed into instruments of containment.

Against these pessimistic tendencies in Frankfurt School thought, the earlier work of both Benjamin and Brecht, which stands in a complex relationship to the Frankfurt School, offers a more hopeful and more activist vision. For Benjamin and Brecht, the political function of art is not simply to produce critical consciousness in a passive audience but to intervene actively in the construction of reality, to use the resources of art to reveal contradictions, to mobilize energy, and to contribute to the transformation of the conditions of social life.

The relationship between these different tendencies within the broader tradition of Western Marxism is itself a significant intellectual question, one that has direct relevance to the kind of literary criticism and cultural analysis that Abdul Kafi practices. How pessimistic or optimistic should one be about the political possibilities of literature and culture? What is the relationship between aesthetic quality and political function? Can great literature serve reactionary ends? Can formally experimental or "difficult" literature serve the interests of liberation? These questions have no simple answers, but they are questions that a Marxian literary scholar must continually confront.

3.5 Postcolonial Theory and Its Marxian Critics

The emergence of postcolonial theory in the 1980s and 1990s, associated particularly with the work of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, transformed the landscape of literary and cultural studies globally. It also generated significant debates within the Marxian tradition, debates that are directly relevant to the kind of work that Abdul Kafi does.

Edward Said's foundational text "Orientalism," published in 1978, drew on Foucault's concept of discourse to analyze the way that Western scholarship had constructed "the Orient" as an object of knowledge that served the interests of colonial power. The Orient, in Said's analysis, is not simply a geographical region. It is a textual construct, a set of representations and discourses that have organized Western understanding of the non-Western world in ways that justified and enabled colonial domination. Said's analysis transformed the way that scholars understood the relationship between knowledge and power in the colonial context.

Homi Bhabha's work, particularly in "The Location of Culture" (1994), developed a more psychoanalytically inflected approach to colonial discourse, drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis to analyze the ambivalences, anxieties, and mimicries that characterize the colonial encounter. For Bhabha, colonial discourse is not a monolithic, coherent system of power. It is shot through with contradictions, instabilities, and moments of "hybridity" in which the colonial subject appropriates and transforms the colonizer's language and culture in ways that undermine colonial authority.

Spivak's work, rooted in a combination of Derrida's deconstruction and Marxian political economy, has focused particularly on the question of the subaltern, the silenced and marginalized subjects of colonial and postcolonial history who cannot speak for themselves within the existing frameworks of knowledge. Her famous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) poses this question with devastating theoretical precision, arguing that the subaltern's speech is always already mediated by the discursive frameworks of colonial and postcolonial power in ways that make genuine self-representation extraordinarily difficult.

The Marxian critique of postcolonial theory, as represented most forcefully by Aijaz Ahmad and, more recently, by Vivek Chibber (both of whom have participated in the Centre for Marxian Studies at Jadavpur), argues that postcolonial theory, for all its insights, tends to displace the analysis of capitalism and class struggle with an analysis of discourse and representation that ultimately depoliticizes the study of colonialism and its legacies. Ahmad's "In Theory" (1992) argued that the "Third Worldism" of figures like Fredric Jameson and the discourse analysis of Said and Bhabha both tend to homogenize and essentialize the diverse societies and cultures of the postcolonial world, and both tend to substitute cultural analysis for the analysis of material conditions.

Chibber's "Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital" (2013) makes a more systematic argument along similar lines, contending that the foundational claims of Subaltern Studies, the Indian historiographical school associated with figures like Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, rest on theoretical premises that are both philosophically incoherent and politically disabling. In particular, Chibber argues against the Subalternist claim that capitalism

in the non-Western world operates through entirely different social logics than capitalism in the West, maintaining instead that the basic dynamics of capital accumulation are universal and that a properly materialist analysis of colonialism and postcolonialism requires understanding these universal dynamics rather than retreating into particularism.

These debates are not merely academic. They have direct implications for the way that Bengali literary texts are read, contextualized, and evaluated. A scholar working in the Centre for Marxian Studies at Jadavpur must position herself in relation to these debates. The engagement of the Centre with figures like Ahmad and Chibber, as well as with figures from the Subaltern Studies tradition, suggests an intellectual culture that takes these debates seriously and is committed to working through them rather than simply resolving them in favor of one side.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE NATIONAL BOOK AGENCY AND THE POLITICS OF PUBLICATION

4.1 Publishing as Political Practice

When we note that Abdul Kafi published his major essay collection with the National Book Agency, we are noting something that carries significant ideological weight. The choice of publisher, in the world of Bengali intellectual publishing, is rarely a neutral or purely commercial decision. Publishers carry ideological identities, and the choice to publish with a particular house signals something about the author's own position in the intellectual and political landscape.

The National Book Agency, as we have already noted, was founded in 1939 by Muzaffar Ahmad, one of the founding figures of the Communist Party of India and one of the most important figures in the history of communist organizing in Bengal. Ahmad, who was known as "Kaka" (uncle) within the communist movement, was a towering figure in the history of the Indian left, a man who survived British colonial imprisonment, partition, and decades of political struggle to continue his intellectual and organizational work well into his nineties. The publishing house he co-founded has, over more than eighty years, been one of the most important channels through which Marxist literature in the Bengali language has been produced and distributed.

Publishing with the NBA is therefore not simply a matter of finding an appropriate commercial outlet for a scholarly book. It is a statement of intellectual and political affiliation. It signals that the work belongs to the tradition that the NBA represents: a tradition of left-wing, Marxian, politically engaged scholarship and writing that is committed to reaching a broad audience, including readers who are workers, students, activists, and ordinary citizens rather than only professional academics. The NBA's publications are typically affordably priced, designed to be accessible to readers who cannot afford the expensive academic books produced by international scholarly publishers. This accessibility is itself a political commitment. It reflects an understanding of intellectual work as something that should be available to the many rather than the few, that should contribute to a broader democratic culture of thinking and debate rather than remaining enclosed within the walls of the university.

4.2 The Title and Its Significance: Mrityuke Dak Jibon Pane

The title of Abdul Kafi's book, "Mrityuke Dak Jibon Pane Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, Langol," rewards careful attention. The phrase "Mrityuke Dak Jibon Pane" can be rendered in English approximately as "Calling Toward Death for the Sake of Life" or "Summoning Death in the Direction of Life." This is a formulation that captures something fundamental about the political and philosophical tradition within which the essays collected in the book are situated.

The idea that genuine life, genuine human flourishing, requires a willingness to face death, to risk death in the struggle against oppression, has deep roots in both the Marxian tradition and the specific Bengali revolutionary tradition from which figures like Kazi Nazrul Islam emerged. For Marx, the revolutionary subject is not simply someone who desires a better material condition. It is someone who has overcome the fear of death sufficiently to act in history, to take the risks that political transformation requires. The Communist Manifesto's famous closing call to action, "Workers of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains," is in part a statement about the overcoming of the fear of death that chains people to their servitude. To act politically for liberation is to accept that one's own life may be at stake.

The specific Bengali revolutionary tradition that informs the phrase draws on images from Kazi Nazrul Islam's poetry and journalism, from Tagore's plays, and from the tradition of political martyrdom that the independence struggle produced. The willingness to die for a cause, to sacrifice oneself for the liberation of the community, is a recurring theme in Bengali nationalist and revolutionary literature. But the phrase "for the sake of life" is crucial. The point is not death for its own sake, not a romantic cult of sacrifice or martyrdom. The point is that the struggle for life, for genuine human living, sometimes requires the willingness to risk everything.

The three texts named in the title, Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol, represent three different but related interventions in the political and cultural life of colonial Bengal. We will analyze each of them in depth in the chapter that follows. For now, it is worth noting that the juxtaposition of these three texts under a single philosophical rubric is itself a significant interpretive gesture. It says something about how Abdul Kafi reads the relationship between literature and politics, between aesthetic form and political content, between the individual text and the broader social context from which it emerges and to which it speaks.

4.3 The Essay as Form

It is also worth noting that the book is described as essays (prabandha in Bengali). The essay is a distinctive literary and intellectual form with its own history and its own philosophical significance. In the Bengali tradition, the essay has been one of the most important vehicles for intellectual work since the nineteenth century. Figures like Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Rabindranath Tagore, and countless others used the essay form to pursue investigations that combined philosophical reflection, literary analysis, historical argument, and political commentary in ways that resisted the division of intellectual labor into separate academic disciplines.

The essay, as practiced in this tradition, is not simply an academic exercise or a preliminary sketch for a more systematic work. It is a form of thinking in public, a demonstration of the process of intellectual inquiry rather than simply its results. The essay writer engages with a problem, circles around it, approaches it from different angles, admits uncertainty, changes direction when the argument requires it, and arrives at conclusions that are provisional rather than final. This form of intellectual honesty, of thinking openly rather than presenting the polished results of thought as if they were inevitable, is itself philosophically significant. It reflects an understanding of knowledge as a process rather than a product, as something that is always in motion rather than securely established.

The fact that Abdul Kafi writes in this form tells us something about his intellectual temperament and his understanding of scholarship. He is not, apparently, a systematizer who aims to construct a comprehensive theoretical edifice. He is an essayist who approaches specific texts and specific problems with the tools of dialectical analysis and who aims to illuminate rather than to categorize. This is a form of scholarship that is particularly well suited to the kind of questions he pursues, questions about the relationship between literature and history, between culture and politics, between the specific text and the broader social process.

CHAPTER FIVE: DHUMKETU, RAKTAKAROBI, LANGOL: THREE TEXTS AND THE WORLD THEY MADE

5.1 The Methodology of Textual Analysis

Before analyzing each of the three texts that form the subject of Abdul Kafi's book, it is worth articulating the methodological principles that guide a Marxian textual analysis of this kind. What does it mean to read a literary text through a Marxian lens? What questions does this method ask, and what answers does it enable?

A Marxian approach to literary analysis begins with the historical situatedness of the text. Every text is produced at a specific historical moment, by a specific author or group of authors, under specific social and economic conditions, and addressed to a specific real or imagined audience. These conditions of production are not merely background information. They are constitutive of the text's meaning. The decisions that a writer makes, about form, about genre, about language, about subject matter, about the relationship between the aesthetic and the political, are all decisions that are shaped by the historical conditions within which the writer works.

But Marxian analysis does not stop with the conditions of production. It also analyzes the conditions of reception: who reads the text, in what contexts, with what expectations, and with what effects. And it analyzes the text's ideological content: what assumptions about social reality does it make, what social contradictions does it register and respond to, what possibilities does it illuminate and what does it obscure, whose interests does it serve and what interests does it challenge?

Finally, a genuinely dialectical analysis must also attend to the formal dimension of the text: how it is organized, what rhetorical or narrative strategies it employs, how its form relates to its content, and whether there are tensions between what the text says and what it does. The most interesting literary texts are often those in which the formal organization of the work reveals contradictions that the explicit content seeks to resolve. Reading these tensions requires close attention to the text as a linguistic and aesthetic artifact, not merely as a vehicle for ideas.

This is the kind of analysis that Abdul Kafi's work pursues. It is a methodology that combines historical and sociological analysis with close textual reading, that takes seriously both the external context and the internal organization of the literary work, and that refuses to separate the aesthetic from the political.

5.2 Dhumketu: The Comet That Set Bengal Ablaze

Dhumketu (The Comet) was a fiercely nationalist, anti-colonial Bengali-language newspaper founded and primarily edited by Kazi Nazrul Islam in 1922. Its very name was a declaration of intent. A comet appears suddenly, brilliantly, disrupting the established order of the heavens, burning brightly and then disappearing. Dhumketu was intended to be that kind of disruption, a sudden, brilliant, burning presence that challenged the colonial order and awakened the political consciousness of the Bengali people.

Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) is one of the most important figures in Bengali literary and cultural history. Known as the "rebel poet" (*bidrohi kobi*), he was born in the Churulia village of what is now West Bengal, into a family of modest means. He received a limited formal education but had an extraordinary natural facility with language, music, and thought. He served in the British Indian Army during the First World War, an experience that profoundly shaped his political consciousness. After the war, he threw himself into literary and political activity with extraordinary energy, producing an astonishing volume of poetry, songs, essays, and journalistic writing while also engaging actively in political agitation.

Nazrul's politics were characterized by a passionate anti-colonialism that was deeply rooted in humanist and universalist values. He was influenced by Marxism, by Islamic theology and mysticism, by Hindu devotional traditions, and by the internationalist revolutionary ferment of his era. He celebrated the Russian Revolution with great enthusiasm and drew connections between the struggles of colonized peoples around the world. But he was also deeply rooted in Bengali cultural and religious traditions, drawing on both Islamic and Hindu imagery and philosophical concepts in his poetry and his journalism. This syncretism, this refusal to accept the communal divisions that colonial rule was actively fostering, was both a philosophical commitment and a political one. In the increasingly communally divided atmosphere of 1920s Bengal, Nazrul's insistence on the unity of Hindus and Muslims in the struggle against colonialism was a bold and dangerous political stance.

Dhumketu embodied all of these characteristics. Its editorials were ferocious, its poetry incendiary, its tone one of absolute commitment to the liberation of India from British rule. The paper published poetry and prose that challenged colonial authority with a directness that was unusual in the Bengali press of the period. It declared itself the voice of those who had been

silenced, the oppressed workers and peasants as well as the educated nationalist classes, and it used the full resources of Bengali literary tradition, including the ghazal, the thumri, and the revolutionary song, to make its political arguments with maximum emotional force.

The colonial government responded predictably. In 1922, Nazrul published a poem in *Dhumketu* titled "Anandamoyeer Agamane" (On the Coming of the Bliss-Giver) that was interpreted by the authorities as seditious. He was arrested and sentenced to prison. In jail, Nazrul went on a hunger strike and wrote one of his most famous poems, "Rajbondir Jabanbondi" (Statement of a Political Prisoner), a defiant declaration of his refusal to accept the legitimacy of colonial justice. He was released only after sustained public pressure and after Tagore wrote to him expressing solidarity.

The significance of *Dhumketu* for Abdul Kafi's analytical project lies in what it represents as a cultural and political phenomenon. It is not simply a piece of historical journalism. It is an example of the way that literary and cultural production can function as a form of political resistance, a way of creating and sustaining a counter-hegemonic consciousness among an oppressed people. The question that Kafi's analysis apparently pursues, given the framing of his book title, is how this cultural resistance relates to the material and political struggle for liberation, and what it means that cultural forms like the newspaper, the poem, and the political essay can carry such enormous political weight.

Dhumketu also raises important questions about the relationship between nationalism and socialism, between the particular struggle for national liberation and the universal struggle for human emancipation. Nazrul was simultaneously a nationalist, a socialist, a Muslim, a Humanist, and a poet. These different dimensions of his identity and his politics were not always in harmony, and the tensions between them are legible in the pages of *Dhumketu* and in his broader body of work. Reading *Dhumketu* with Marxian tools means attending to these tensions, understanding them as symptomatic of the contradictions of the colonial moment, and drawing out their implications for understanding the relationship between culture and politics in the anticolonial struggle.

5.3 Raktakarobi: Tagore and the Critique of Industrial Capitalism

Raktakarobi (Red Oleanders) is a play by Rabindranath Tagore, first performed in 1926. It is one of Tagore's most politically ambitious and philosophically complex dramatic works, a dense, symbolist text that engages directly with the critique of industrial capitalism and its effects on human freedom and human community.

The play is set in Yakshapuri, a mythical underground city whose entire life is organized around the extraction of gold from the earth. The King, who rules the city, is invisible, concealed behind a net of gold, speaking only through messengers and agents. The people of Yakshapuri have been transformed by the demands of gold extraction into something less than fully human: atomized, driven, stripped of their natural connections to each other and to the earth. The city's symbol is the red oleander flower, which continues to grow and bloom even in the darkness and suffocation of Yakshapuri, representing the endurance of natural life and beauty in the face of the machine world.

The play's central figure is Nandini, a young woman of extraordinary natural vitality, beauty, and joy, who has come to Yakshapuri looking for her beloved Ranjan. Nandini's presence in the city is a disruption of its entire logic. She cannot be absorbed into the machine. She insists on her own humanity, her own desire, her own connection to the living world outside the city's walls. She is, in Gramscian terms, a figure of counter-hegemony: her very existence challenges the dominant values and assumptions of Yakshapuri.

The King, for his part, is fascinated by Nandini. She represents something he has lost in his pursuit of gold and power: his own humanity, his own connection to the living world. The play traces the complex, doomed relationship between the King and Nandini, between the system of capitalist production and the human values that system destroys and yet cannot entirely eliminate.

Tagore wrote *Raktakarobi* during a period of intense engagement with the critique of industrial modernity. He had visited the Soviet Union in 1930 and written about his impressions with characteristic complexity, praising the social experiment while maintaining reservations about the suppression of individual freedom. His engagement with Western political and philosophical thought was deep and long-standing, and *Raktakarobi* reflects his reading of both Marxist analyses of capitalism and Western critiques of industrial civilization from Ruskin and Morris to the Frankfurt School *avant la lettre*.

But *Raktakarobi* is not a piece of political propaganda. It is a work of literary art whose power derives from its symbolic richness, its complex characters, and its refusal of simple political answers. The play does not offer a revolutionary program. It offers something more ambiguous and more troubling: a vision of what is lost when human beings organize their lives entirely around the pursuit of material wealth, and a gesture toward what might be recovered in the struggle to reclaim human wholeness.

For Abdul Kafi's analytical purposes, *Raktakarobi* raises central questions about the relationship between aesthetic form and political content in Tagore's work, about the specific character of Tagore's critique of capitalism and modernity, about how that critique relates to Marxian analyses of the same phenomena, and about the legacy of this play for subsequent Bengali literary engagements with the question of capitalist development and its human costs.

The play has also been the subject of controversy and debate. Some Marxist critics have argued that Tagore's critique of capitalism is fundamentally idealist rather than materialist, that it focuses on the spiritual and humanistic costs of industrial production rather than on its economic structure and its class contradictions. Others have argued that Tagore's symbolist approach captures dimensions of the experience of capitalist modernity that a purely economic analysis cannot reach, that the play's aesthetic density is itself a form of truth-telling that supplements and enriches materialist analysis.

The inclusion of *Raktakarobi* in Abdul Kafi's book, alongside the overtly political journalism of *Dhumketu*, is itself a significant intellectual gesture. It says that the Marxian analysis of colonial Bengal must engage with the most sophisticated literary work produced in that context, not only with the most directly political. It says that Tagore, for all his apparent distance from Marxian

theory, is a crucial interlocutor for anyone trying to understand the relationship between culture and power in colonial Bengal. And it says that the question of what literature can do, of how aesthetic form relates to political possibility, cannot be settled in advance but must be worked out in the encounter with specific texts.

5.4 Langol: The Plough and the Politics of the Peasantry

Langol (The Plough) was a short-lived but historically significant Bengali-language journal published in 1925-1926 by Kazi Nazrul Islam and Muzaffar Ahmad, who was also, as we have noted, the co-founder of the National Book Agency. Langol was explicitly a journal of peasant and worker interests, committed to a socialist and broadly Marxian politics. The title itself is rich with symbolic meaning. The plough is the instrument of peasant labor, the tool with which the earth is turned and food is produced. To name a political journal after the plough is to assert the centrality of peasant labor to social life and to claim the political significance of the peasant class that colonial India's ruling classes were most interested in rendering invisible.

Langol appeared at a crucial moment in the history of left-wing politics in India. The Communist Party of India had been formally established in 1920-1921, and by the mid-1920s it was beginning to establish organizational presence in Bengal. The question of how to relate Marxian socialist politics to the specific conditions of Indian society, particularly the enormous peasant majority and the complex intersections of class, caste, community, and colonial domination, was already a central one for Indian communists. Langol was an attempt to address this question directly, through a combination of political journalism, literary contribution, and cultural engagement.

The relationship between Nazrul and Muzaffar Ahmad is itself a fascinating intellectual and political story. Ahmad was a more orthodox Marxist, a dedicated party organizer who maintained connections to the international communist movement. Nazrul was more emotionally and aesthetically driven, more resistant to organizational discipline, more committed to the combination of revolutionary politics with an equally revolutionary literary practice. Their collaboration on Langol represents a rare and productive conjunction of these two types of left-wing intellectual, the theorist-organizer and the poet-agitator.

Langol published poetry, essays, reportage on the conditions of workers and peasants, and political commentary. Its literary contributions were not ornamental additions to the political content. They were understood as integral to the political project. Poetry and literature were weapons in the struggle for social transformation, tools for awakening political consciousness and sustaining the emotional commitment to revolutionary change. This understanding of the relationship between culture and politics, between aesthetic form and political function, is itself a significant theoretical position, one that connects Langol to the broader tradition of socialist cultural politics that extended from the early Soviet avant-garde through Brecht to the IPTA and the progressive writers' movements of 1930s and 1940s India.

The analysis of Langol in Kafi's book apparently addresses these questions of form and function, of the relationship between the literary and the political, of how a journal committed to the interests of the most marginalized social classes can use the resources of literary culture to

advance that commitment. It also presumably addresses the historical significance of Langol in the development of left-wing politics and culture in Bengal, its connections to the broader history of communist organizing, and its legacy for subsequent generations of left-wing writers and intellectuals.

CHAPTER SIX: LITERARY THEORY AND THE BENGALI CANON

6.1 What Is Literary Theory and Why Does It Matter?

For students approaching literary studies for the first time, or for students trained primarily in the traditions of reading "great texts" for their aesthetic and moral significance, the question of why literary theory matters can seem puzzling. Is it not enough to simply read good books carefully and thoughtfully? Does one really need a whole apparatus of theoretical concepts and frameworks to appreciate what a poem or a novel or a play is doing?

The answer, in a word, is yes. Not because theory is intrinsically superior to reading, or because theoretical sophistication is a mark of intellectual seriousness that simple reading lacks. But because all reading, however apparently immediate and intuitive, is already theory-laden. Every act of reading makes assumptions about what literature is, how language works, what the relationship between text and context is, what the criteria of literary value are, and what the purposes of literary study should be. These assumptions can be left implicit and unexamined, in which case they remain beyond criticism and beyond revision, or they can be made explicit and examined, in which case they can be evaluated, defended, challenged, and refined.

Literary theory is, at its best, the systematic examination of the assumptions that underlie literary practice. It asks: what is a text? What is an author? What is a reader? What is meaning, and where does it reside? What is the relationship between literature and history, between aesthetic form and social reality, between the pleasure of reading and the knowledge that reading produces? These are not abstract or purely academic questions. They have direct implications for how we read specific texts, and the answers we give to them shape everything about the kind of literary criticism we practice.

In the Bengali academic tradition, literary theory has developed along several trajectories. The classical Sanskrit tradition of poetics, with its highly sophisticated analyses of *rasa* (aesthetic emotion), *dhvani* (resonance, or the suggested meaning of a text), and *alankar* (figures of speech), provided one theoretical inheritance. The engagement with Western literary theory from the nineteenth century onward brought new frameworks and new questions. And the specifically Marxian tradition of literary and cultural theory, which we have been discussing throughout this chapter, has been particularly important in the Bengali intellectual context, given the deep engagement of Bengali intellectual culture with left-wing politics.

Abdul Kafi's work is situated within this complex theoretical landscape. His coordination of the Centre for Marxian Studies, his choice of texts, and the philosophical framing of his published essays all suggest a scholar who is deeply versed in literary theory and who deploys theoretical

tools with both rigor and critical awareness. But it is also important to note that in the best tradition of Marxian literary criticism, theory is always in the service of the analysis of specific texts and specific historical situations. Theory is not an end in itself. It is a means of illuminating the world.

6.2 The Canon Question in Bengali Studies

The question of the literary canon, which texts are taught, studied, anthologized, and celebrated as representative of the highest achievements of a literary culture, is a deeply political question. Decisions about the canon are never made on purely aesthetic grounds. They reflect and reinforce hierarchies of class, gender, religion, language, and region, and they shape the way that a literary tradition understands itself and presents itself to the world.

In Bengali literary studies, the canon has historically been dominated by figures from the Hindu *bhadralok* (educated middle class), predominantly from Kolkata and its environs, predominantly male, and predominantly engaged with the concerns of that relatively privileged social group. The towering figure of Rabindranath Tagore, whose influence on Bengali literary culture has been so immense that it has sometimes been described as both inspirational and oppressive, the "anxiety of influence" that every subsequent Bengali writer has had to negotiate, is in many ways the embodiment of this canonical tradition.

But the Bengali literary tradition is far more diverse, far more contested, and far more complex than any single-author or single-class canon can capture. The literature of Bengali Muslim writers, from the great medieval poets like Alaol to the nationalists and progressives of the twentieth century, has historically been undervalued in the mainstream Bengali literary canon. The literature of Dalit and low-caste writers has been even more marginalized. The literature of women writers, despite some significant recognition in recent decades, remains underrepresented in relation to its actual quantity and quality. The literature of the peasantry, which is enormous in volume and extraordinary in richness, has often been dismissed as "folk" or "popular" culture rather than recognized as a major dimension of Bengali literary life.

The Centre for Marxian Studies at Jadavpur, under Abdul Kafi's coordination, has consistently engaged with the politics of the canon, with the question of whose literature is studied and whose is ignored, whose cultural productions are taken seriously as intellectual and aesthetic achievements and whose are dismissed as merely popular or merely functional. This is not simply an academic question. It is a question about cultural power and cultural justice, about who gets to be represented and recognized in the story that a culture tells about itself.

The inclusion of *Langol*, a working-class and peasant-oriented journal, alongside *Raktakarobi*, a work by the canonical figure Tagore, in Abdul Kafi's analytical project, is itself a statement about the canon. It says that the full picture of Bengali literary and cultural life in the 1920s cannot be drawn by attending only to the canonical figures. It requires attending also to the marginal, the popular, the politically committed, the explicitly partisan. And it suggests that the relationship between these different literary-political formations is itself a crucial question, that understanding canonical works like *Raktakarobi* requires understanding the context of popular and politically committed literature like *Langol* and *Dhumketu*.

6.3 Semiotics, Stylistics, and the Technical Analysis of Literary Texts

The Department of Bengali at Jadavpur University, as we noted earlier, includes in its curriculum areas like semiotics and stylistics. These approaches to literary analysis offer important tools for the kind of work that Abdul Kafi pursues.

Semiotics, the study of signs and sign systems, was developed as a formal discipline in the twentieth century by figures like Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce, and Roland Barthes. Saussure's foundational insight, that the linguistic sign is composed of a signifier (a sound-image or written form) and a signified (a concept), and that the relationship between them is arbitrary rather than natural, had revolutionary implications for the study of language, literature, and culture. If the relationship between word and meaning is conventional rather than necessary, then language is not a transparent medium through which we access reality. It is a system of differences that constructs and organizes reality in ways that are socially and historically variable.

For literary analysis, this means attending to the specific ways that literary texts use language, the particular choices of word, syntax, rhythm, metaphor, and structure that constitute a text's specific literary character. Stylistics, which applies linguistic analysis to literary texts, provides tools for making this kind of close analysis more systematic and more rigorous. Instead of simply asserting that a text has "poetic qualities" or "vivid imagery," stylistic analysis can specify precisely what linguistic features produce these effects and how they relate to the text's broader meanings.

Roland Barthes, in his later work, developed a form of semiotic analysis of cultural texts and cultural practices that was deeply influenced by Marxian ideas. His analyses of advertising, fashion, wrestling, and other cultural phenomena in "Mythologies" (1957) showed how everyday cultural practices are organized by ideological myths that naturalize historically specific and class-specific values and interests. This approach extends the Marxian analysis of ideology into the domain of cultural analysis in ways that are directly relevant to the study of literary texts.

For a scholar working in the Bengali tradition on texts like *Dhumketu*, *Raktakarobi*, and *Langol*, these semiotic and stylistic tools offer important resources for the close analysis of how specific texts achieve their political and aesthetic effects. The question is not only what a text says, not only what social context it responds to, but how it says it, what specific linguistic and formal strategies it employs, and how these strategies relate to the text's broader political and ideological significance.

CHAPTER SEVEN: POLITICAL ECONOMY AND CULTURAL THEORY IN BENGAL

7.1 The Colonial Economy and Its Cultural Consequences

One of the most important contributions of Marxian thought to the understanding of Bengali literary and cultural history is the analysis of the colonial economy and its effects on cultural

production. Without understanding the economic structures of colonial Bengal, it is impossible to understand why Bengali culture took the forms it did, why certain literary traditions emerged when they did, why certain political orientations became dominant, and why the tensions and contradictions that appear in texts like *Dhumketu* and *Raktakarobi* have the specific character they do.

The British colonial economy in Bengal was characterized by several distinctive features that shaped cultural life in profound ways. The first was the transformation of Bengal into a major producer of raw materials and agricultural commodities for the global capitalist market, combined with the systematic deindustrialization of Bengal's pre-colonial artisan and manufacturing economy. Bengal had been, before British conquest, one of the most economically developed regions of Asia, famous for its textile production, its trade networks, and its sophisticated financial institutions. The British conquest destroyed this economy systematically, replacing it with an economy organized around the extraction of agricultural surplus and the production of export commodities like indigo, jute, and tea under conditions of extreme coercion and exploitation.

The consequences for Bengal's social structure were immense. The old aristocratic and merchant classes were partially displaced and partially transformed into a new class of landlords, money-lenders, and professional intermediaries whose wealth depended on their collaboration with the colonial economy. The new educated middle class, the *bhadralok*, emerged from this process: a class of educated Bengalis who occupied subordinate positions in the colonial administration, the professions, and the cultural institutions of colonial Bengal. This class was simultaneously privileged (in relation to the peasant and working classes) and subordinate (in relation to the British colonizers and the global capitalist system they represented), and this double position gave Bengali *bhadralok* culture its characteristic combination of nationalist aspiration and social conservatism.

The peasant and working classes, who constituted the overwhelming majority of the Bengali population, lived under conditions of extreme exploitation that were shaped by the specific structures of the colonial economy. The Permanent Settlement of 1793, which had fixed land revenue at a fixed rate and effectively handed control of Bengal's agricultural economy to a class of absentee landlords, created the conditions for a particularly brutal form of agrarian capitalism in which peasants were stripped of their surplus with extraordinary efficiency and with minimal investment in productivity improvements or social welfare.

Understanding this economic structure is essential for understanding why a journal like *Langol*, explicitly committed to peasant and worker interests, emerged when it did and took the form it did. It is essential for understanding why Tagore's critique of industrial capitalism in *Raktakarobi* resonated with the anxieties of the Bengali educated class in the 1920s. And it is essential for understanding why Nazrul's anti-colonial nationalism had the explosive emotional force it did, why the comet of *Dhumketu* burst so brilliantly into the political sky of 1920s Bengal.

7.2 The Drain of Wealth: Colonial Economics and Intellectual History

The theory of the "drain of wealth," developed by the Indian nationalist economist Dadabhai Naoroji and elaborated by figures like R.C. Dutt and, more recently, by Utsa Patnaik in her groundbreaking research, holds that British colonialism was not simply a system of political domination but a systematic economic mechanism for transferring wealth from India to Britain. Patnaik's calculations, published in 2018, estimate that Britain drained approximately 45 trillion dollars worth of wealth from India between 1765 and 1938. This figure, however one assesses the methodological debates around it, points to the scale of the economic violence that underlay British colonial rule and that explains how a small island nation on the far side of the world was able to maintain its domination over a vast subcontinent for almost two centuries.

The drain of wealth theory has direct implications for the analysis of Bengali cultural history. The poverty that characterized the lives of Bengal's peasants and workers was not simply a natural condition. It was produced by the colonial system. The famines that periodically devastated Bengal, including the catastrophic Bengal Famine of 1943 that killed between three and four million people, were not natural disasters but products of colonial economic policies that prioritized the extraction of surplus for the war effort over the survival of the Bengali population.

This understanding of poverty as produced rather than natural is itself a crucial intellectual and political achievement. It transforms the analysis of social conditions from a charitable concern with unfortunate circumstances into a political critique of the structures that produce those circumstances. For a Marxian literary scholar, it means reading literary texts that engage with poverty, exploitation, and suffering not simply as depictions of unfortunate realities but as interventions in the political struggle over how those realities should be understood and what should be done about them.

7.3 Class, Caste, and the Limits of Classical Marxism

One of the most significant debates in the Marxian analysis of South Asian society concerns the relationship between class, as the central category of classical Marxism, and caste, the specifically South Asian system of hereditary social stratification that intersects with but cannot be reduced to class in the classical sense. This debate is not merely academic. It has profound implications for political strategy, for the construction of political coalitions, and for the analysis of cultural phenomena including literature.

Classical Marxism, as developed by Marx and Engels and elaborated by Lenin and the early Communist International, tended to analyze South Asian society primarily in terms of the categories of European political economy: bourgeoisie, proletariat, peasantry, landlord class. These categories were understood as universal, applicable to all societies undergoing capitalist development regardless of their specific historical and cultural features. The expectation was that as capitalist development proceeded in India, as with everywhere else, it would dissolve traditional social structures including caste, and replace them with the universal class relations of capitalism.

This expectation was only partially realized. While capitalist development in India has certainly transformed social structures in significant ways, caste has proven remarkably resilient, adapting

itself to new economic conditions rather than dissolving under the pressure of capitalist development. Caste discrimination and caste violence remain major features of Indian social life in the twenty-first century, and the relationship between caste oppression and class exploitation is extremely complex, with caste often functioning as a mechanism for the enforcement of class subordination but also having its own dynamics that cannot be reduced to class.

The Ambedkarite tradition, associated with B.R. Ambedkar, the great Dalit leader, jurist, and intellectual, offers a profound critique of the limits of Marxian analysis in the Indian context. Ambedkar argued that caste, not class, is the fundamental social division in Indian society, and that the liberation of Dalit people cannot be achieved through the class struggle of the labor movement alone but requires a specifically anti-caste political project. The relationship between Marxism and Ambedkarism has been one of the most significant and most productive tensions in Indian intellectual and political life for the past century, and it continues to generate important debates in contemporary Indian scholarship.

For Abdul Kafi, working in the Bengali tradition at Jadavpur University, this tension between Marxism and Ambedkarism is a live intellectual issue. The Bengali tradition has historically been somewhat less attentive to caste as a specifically Dalit issue than some other Indian regional traditions, perhaps partly because the Bengali bhadralok class that has dominated Bengali intellectual culture has been predominantly upper-caste and has tended to see social inequality primarily through the lens of class rather than caste. But Dalit Bengali writing, which has a long history that has been largely marginalized in the canonical accounts of Bengali literature, is increasingly being recovered and studied, and the questions it raises about the limits of class analysis and the specific character of caste oppression are ones that any contemporary Marxian scholar working in the Bengali context must engage with seriously.

7.4 Gender, Feminism, and the Marxian Tradition

The relationship between Marxism and feminism is another crucial intellectual terrain that shapes the context within which Abdul Kafi works. From the early feminist Marxism of Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai to the socialist feminism of figures like Juliet Mitchell and Nancy Fraser to the more recent engagements of Silvia Federici and others, the attempt to develop a synthesis of Marxian political economy and feminist analysis has been one of the most productive and most contested areas of left-wing intellectual life.

The basic argument for such a synthesis is straightforward: capitalism exploits not only the waged labor of workers in factories and offices but also the unwaged reproductive labor of women in the home. The unpaid domestic labor that women perform, cooking, cleaning, childcare, emotional support, is essential for the reproduction of the labor force on which capitalist production depends, but it is systematically devalued and rendered invisible in classical Marxian accounts that focus exclusively on the commodity-producing labor of the formal economy. A genuinely comprehensive Marxian analysis must therefore account for gender and reproductive labor as fundamental dimensions of the capitalist system, not merely as secondary or derived phenomena.

In the Bengali context, these questions connect to the long history of feminist writing and feminist politics in Bengal, from the pioneering figures of the nineteenth-century women's movement to the extraordinary literary contributions of writers like Mahasweta Devi, whose fiction about Dalit women, tribal communities, and the survivors of historical violence represents one of the most significant bodies of politically engaged literature in any South Asian language. The Centre for Marxian Studies' engagement with scholars like Himani Bannerji, whose work explicitly addresses the intersection of Marxism, feminism, and anti-racism, suggests an awareness of the need for this kind of theoretical synthesis.

CHAPTER EIGHT: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES: BENGALI MARXISM IN GLOBAL CONTEXT

8.1 Marxism and the Global South: Dependency, World-Systems, and Imperialism

The Marxian analysis of colonialism and postcolonialism has produced a rich body of theory over the past century that provides important comparative contexts for understanding the specifically Bengali tradition in which Abdul Kafi works. This body of theory includes Lenin's analysis of imperialism, Rosa Luxemburg's analysis of capitalist accumulation in the non-capitalist periphery, the dependency theory developed in Latin America by figures like Andre Gunder Frank and Celso Furtado, Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory, and Samir Amin's theory of unequal exchange.

Lenin's "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism" (1917) argued that capitalism in its late stage generates the export of capital to colonized regions as a mechanism for resolving its internal contradictions, particularly the tendency toward declining rates of profit in the metropolitan economy. This analysis has been extremely influential in the Marxian tradition, but it has also been subject to significant revision and critique. In particular, it has been argued that Lenin's analysis underestimates the degree to which imperialism transforms and reshapes the economies of colonized regions rather than simply exploiting them from outside.

Dependency theory, developed primarily in the context of Latin American development economics, argued that the poverty of the "periphery" of the global capitalist system is not a stage on the road to development but a structural consequence of the relationship between the periphery and the "core" of advanced capitalist countries. The periphery is poor not because it has not yet developed but because the global capitalist system actively underdevelops it, transferring surplus from the periphery to the core through mechanisms of unequal exchange. This analysis has direct parallels with the drain of wealth theory as applied to India, and it has been influential in Indian Marxian economics, particularly in the work of figures like Prabhat Patnaik.

Wallerstein's world-systems theory extends and systematizes these insights into a comprehensive account of the modern world-system as a single integrated capitalist economy differentiated into core, semi-periphery, and periphery. This framework has been enormously influential in the social sciences globally, and it has generated important debates in Indian historiography about

how to understand the place of India in the global capitalist system during the colonial and postcolonial periods.

Samir Amin's contribution, building on but also criticizing Wallerstein, focuses on the concept of unequal exchange and the consequences of what he calls "accumulation on a world scale" for the development and underdevelopment of different regions. Amin's participation in the seminars of the Centre for Marxian Studies at Jadavpur is particularly significant. His presence signals an intellectual dialogue between the specifically Bengali Marxian tradition and the African and Arab Marxian traditions, a dialogue that enriches both by revealing the common structural features of colonial and postcolonial experience across different regional contexts while also attending to the specific differences.

8.2 Comparative Literature and the Politics of Language

The Department of Bengali at Jadavpur University exists within a faculty that also houses one of the most distinguished departments of comparative literature in India. The relationship between Bengali studies and comparative literature is itself philosophically significant and raises important questions about the politics of language, translation, and the global circulation of literary knowledge.

Comparative literature as a discipline emerged in Europe in the nineteenth century, shaped by the Romantic nationalist idea that each literature, like each nation, has its own distinctive spirit or character that is expressed in a particular language. The comparison of literatures was understood as a way of illuminating the similarities and differences between different national cultures. But this framework was also profoundly Eurocentric. The "world literature" of early comparative literature was primarily a comparison of European national literatures, with non-European literatures either ignored entirely or treated as exotic curiosities at the margins of the real literary tradition.

The critique of this Eurocentrism, and the attempt to develop a genuinely global comparative literature that takes non-European literary traditions seriously on their own terms, has been one of the major intellectual projects in the field over the past several decades. Figures like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her "Death of a Discipline" (2003), have argued for a radical reconceptualization of comparative literature that would center the world's minority literatures and challenge the hegemony of English and the other major European languages in the global literary academy.

For Bengali studies at Jadavpur, this debate has direct relevance. Bengali is a language spoken by more than 230 million people worldwide, making it one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. It has a literary tradition of extraordinary richness and depth that deserves to be known and studied on a global scale. But the global circulation of literary knowledge remains profoundly unequal, with the literatures of the global South, including Bengali literature, vastly underrepresented in international scholarly discourse relative to their intrinsic significance.

The question of translation is central here. Most people who are not native Bengali speakers can only access Bengali literature through translation, and the quality, coverage, and framing of those

translations shapes the way Bengali literature is understood outside Bengal. Important texts remain untranslated. Translation decisions are made on commercial grounds that reflect the interests of the global publishing market rather than the intrinsic importance of the texts. And translations, however excellent, always lose something, particularly the specifically Bengali dimensions of a text, its specific relationship to the Bengali language, its resonances with Bengali cultural history, its use of register and tone in ways that are deeply specific to Bengali speech communities.

Abdul Kafi's work, written in Bengali and published by a Bengali publishing house, participates in this politics of language and translation. It is part of a tradition of Bengali intellectual life that insists on conducting its most important conversations in the Bengali language rather than translating them into English for a global academic audience. This choice is itself a political and philosophical statement. It says that Bengali intellectual life does not need to seek validation from the global English-language academy. It has its own agenda, its own questions, its own tradition of inquiry, and its own criteria of rigor and significance. At the same time, the engagement of the Centre for Marxian Studies with international scholars working in English and other European languages signals an openness to dialogue that refuses any narrow linguistic nationalism.

8.3 Brecht and the Bengali Stage

Bertolt Brecht, the German Marxist playwright and theorist, has had an enormous influence on the tradition of politically committed theater in India generally and in Bengal specifically. Brecht's theory of the "alienation effect" (*Verfremdungseffekt*), which holds that politically effective theater should disrupt the audience's habitual emotional identification with characters and situations in order to create a critical, analytical consciousness rather than a merely empathetic one, has been applied and adapted by Bengali theater practitioners and theorists across the second half of the twentieth century.

Brecht's influence is particularly visible in the tradition of the "group theater" (*dal natya*) in Bengal, which developed from the late 1940s onward and which attempted to use theater as a vehicle for political mobilization and social critique. Figures like Bijon Bhattacharya, Utpal Dutt, and Badal Sircar developed theatrical practices that drew on Brechtian techniques while also adapting them to the specific cultural traditions and political circumstances of Bengal. The IPTA, which brought together theater workers, writers, composers, and political activists in a common cultural project, was the institutional matrix within which much of this work was developed.

The relationship between Brechtian theory and the specifically Bengali theatrical tradition raises important questions about the politics of cultural influence and the dynamics of cross-cultural exchange. How are ideas and techniques developed in one cultural context appropriated and transformed when they travel to another? What is preserved, what is changed, and what is lost? These questions are methodologically important for any comparative analysis of cultural forms across different national and linguistic contexts, and they are questions that a Marxian cultural theory must address if it is to avoid the reduction of cultural analysis to a simple reflection theory.

8.4 Vivek Chibber and the Universalism Debate

The publication of Vivek Chibber's "Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital" in 2013 generated one of the most significant debates in postcolonial and Marxian studies in recent years. Chibber, an American sociologist of Indian origin, mounted a systematic critique of the Subaltern Studies school of historiography, arguing that its central theoretical claims are incoherent and that its political implications are regressive rather than progressive.

The core of Chibber's argument is that the Subalternist claim that capitalism in India operates through social logics fundamentally different from those in the West, and that therefore Western Marxian theory cannot be applied to the Indian context, rests on a misunderstanding of what capitalism is and how it works. Capitalism, Chibber argues, is not a cultural system but an economic one, based on the universally applicable logic of the compulsion to compete that market relations impose on all producers. This logic generates the same basic dynamics of exploitation, resistance, and crisis everywhere that capitalism operates, regardless of the local cultural specificities of each context. A genuinely materialist analysis of colonialism and its legacies must therefore proceed from these universal structures rather than retreating into the particularism that Subalternist historiography tends toward.

The debate that Chibber's book generated brought together scholars with a wide range of theoretical commitments and produced a significant clarification of the stakes of the arguments between Marxism and postcolonial theory. For the Centre for Marxian Studies at Jadavpur, which has engaged with both Chibber and with scholars from the Subaltern Studies tradition, this debate is not merely academic. It bears directly on the question of how Bengali literary and cultural history should be analyzed, whether through the universal categories of Marxian political economy or through more culturally specific frameworks, and what the political implications of these different analytical approaches are.

Abdul Kafi's coordination of the Centre places him at the center of this debate. The intellectual culture he helps to sustain at the Centre is one that takes both the universalist claims of classical Marxism and the particularist insights of postcolonial theory seriously, that refuses easy resolution in either direction, and that insists on working through the specific analyses of specific texts and specific historical situations as the only reliable way of advancing the discussion.

CHAPTER NINE: THE POLITICS AND PROBLEMS OF THE CONTEMPORARY INDIAN UNIVERSITY

9.1 The University as a Site of Struggle

Universities are not neutral institutions. They are sites of social reproduction, places where the knowledge and values that sustain existing social arrangements are produced, transmitted, and legitimized. But they are also, at their best, sites of critical inquiry, places where the existing arrangements of society are subjected to rigorous analysis and where alternative possibilities are imagined and elaborated. This double character of the university, as both an institution of social

reproduction and a potential site of critical and emancipatory thought, is the source of the specific tensions and conflicts that characterize academic life.

In India, this double character takes on a specific form shaped by the history of colonialism, postcolonial development, and the ongoing conflicts over the direction of Indian society. The Indian university system was largely created under British colonial rule, designed primarily to produce the educated intermediaries that the colonial administration required. After independence, the Indian state inherited this system and attempted to transform it in ways that would serve the goals of national development. But the tensions between the university as a site of social reproduction and the university as a site of critical inquiry have persisted and have taken on new forms in the era of neoliberal globalization and the rise of Hindu nationalist politics under the BJP.

Jadavpur University has been particularly significant as a site of student and faculty activism. It has a long tradition of political engagement, of students and faculty taking stands on political issues, of democratic governance within the institution, and of resistance to external pressures from both government and corporate interests. This tradition has generated both extraordinary intellectual vitality and painful conflicts, including several major crises in recent years that have attracted national and international attention.

The assault on Abdul Kafi in 2019 must be understood in this context. The attack was not simply the act of a deranged individual, though the perpetrator may indeed have had psychological difficulties. It was part of a broader pattern of intimidation and violence directed at left-wing academics in India in the period of rising Hindu nationalist politics. The fact that the attacker was identified with the RSS, the Hindu nationalist organization that is the ideological parent of the ruling BJP, and the fact that he had been stalking and threatening Kafi for some time before the physical attack, suggests a political motivation rather than a merely personal one. Muslim academics in Indian universities have faced increasing hostility and discrimination in the context of the Hindu nationalist political agenda that has framed Muslims as inherently suspect and has sought to challenge the secularist foundations of Indian public institutions.

The response of the Jadavpur University Teachers' Association, which condemned the attack and demanded strict action against the perpetrator, reflects the culture of institutional solidarity and political engagement that has historically characterized Jadavpur. But the incident also reveals the limits of institutional protection in a political environment in which anti-Muslim sentiment is increasingly normalized and in which left-wing academics are increasingly targeted for their political views.

9.2 Academic Freedom and Its Enemies

The question of academic freedom has been one of the most contested in Indian higher education in recent years. The rise of the BJP to national power in 2014 and its consolidation of power in subsequent elections has been accompanied by increasing political pressure on universities, particularly those with strong traditions of left-wing and critical scholarship. Faculty have been threatened, intimidated, and in some cases prosecuted for their research and their public statements. Students who engage in political activism, particularly on issues related to caste

discrimination, minority rights, or criticism of the government's policies, have faced suspension, expulsion, and criminal charges. The appointment processes for university governing bodies and for senior administrative positions have been increasingly politicized in ways that challenge the autonomy of institutions.

The specific situation of Muslim scholars in Indian universities has become increasingly difficult. The passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act in 2019, the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, and the rhetoric of the ruling party and its allied organizations have created an environment in which Muslim Indians feel increasingly targeted and marginalized. For Muslim academics, who must navigate both the general pressures of political interference in universities and the specific pressures of anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination, the challenge of maintaining intellectual integrity and professional independence has become more difficult.

Abdul Kafi, as a Muslim scholar at a left-wing university, is particularly vulnerable to these pressures. His coordination of the Centre for Marxian Studies places him at the center of an intellectual culture that is explicitly at odds with the Hindu nationalist agenda. His scholarly engagement with the tradition of Bengali Marxism and with the history of anti-colonial struggle places him in a lineage that the Hindu nationalist movement has sought to marginalize and delegitimize. The attack he suffered in 2019 was, in this context, a symptom of a broader political climate rather than an isolated incident.

9.3 The Crisis of the Left in West Bengal

The defeat of the Left Front government in West Bengal in 2011, after thirty-four years in power, and the rise of the Trinamool Congress under Mamata Banerjee, marked a significant turning point in the political history of the state. The Left Front's long period in government had created conditions that were, in many ways, favorable to left-wing intellectual culture: a sympathetic state government, public investment in education and culture, and a political environment in which Marxian ideas had institutional legitimacy.

The defeat of the Left Front was itself a complex phenomenon, reflecting both the organizational failures and political mistakes of the CPI(M) and its allies, the disillusionment of many traditional Left voters with the party's handling of issues like the Nandigram violence of 2007, and the remarkable organizational and mobilizational capacities of Mamata Banerjee's movement. But it also reflected deeper structural changes in Bengali society, including the fragmentation of the peasant vote that had been the Left Front's traditional base, the aspirations of a new generation of voters who had grown up in the era of economic liberalization and who did not identify with the political culture of the traditional left, and the increasingly complex intersection of class, community, and identity politics that the Left Front had failed to adequately navigate.

The consequences for left-wing intellectual culture in West Bengal have been significant. The Trinamool Congress government has been broadly hostile to the left-wing academic culture of institutions like Jadavpur, and has at times used political pressure, patronage, and intimidation to influence appointments and governance in public universities. The space for left-wing organizing

and political expression has narrowed in ways that would have been unimaginable a generation ago.

For scholars like Abdul Kafi, who are committed to the tradition of Marxian scholarship and to the institutional culture of the Centre for Marxian Studies, this political environment represents both a challenge and a responsibility. The challenge is to maintain the intellectual integrity and political independence of the Centre's work in circumstances that make that increasingly difficult. The responsibility is to continue doing that work with the rigor and commitment that it requires, knowing that the tradition one represents is under pressure and that its future depends on the quality of the scholarship and the strength of the intellectual community that sustains it.

9.4 Neoliberal University Reforms and Their Consequences

The pressures facing left-wing academics in India are not only political in the narrow sense of party politics. They are also structural, arising from the global project of neoliberal university reform that has transformed higher education systems around the world over the past three decades. Neoliberal university reforms, driven by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and their regional counterparts, have sought to transform universities from institutions of public education and critical scholarship into providers of "human capital" for the market economy. The consequences for the humanities and social sciences have been particularly severe.

Under neoliberal reform pressures, universities are increasingly evaluated on the basis of their contributions to economic growth, their production of graduates who can fill the requirements of the market, and their generation of research that can be commercialized and turned into intellectual property. Disciplines that do not have an obvious economic function, including literary studies, philosophy, history, and much of the social sciences, are marginalized and defunded. The metrics of research evaluation, citations, impact factors, grant income, prioritize the kind of quantitative, technical research that fits easily into the norms of natural science and applied research, while devaluing the qualitative, interpretive, and critical work that characterizes the best scholarship in the humanities.

For a Bengali literary scholar working in the Marxian tradition, these pressures are acutely felt. The work of analyzing literary texts for their historical and political significance, of conducting interdisciplinary seminars on Marxian theory, of publishing essays in Bengali for a broad educated audience rather than technical articles in international scholarly journals, does not fit easily into the metrics of neoliberal academic evaluation. The Centre for Marxian Studies, which organizes public intellectual events and engages with a broad range of scholars and citizens rather than producing patentable research, is precisely the kind of institution that neoliberal university reform seeks to eliminate.

The defense of this kind of institution, and of the intellectual values it represents, is not simply a matter of self-interest or professional defensiveness. It is a matter of intellectual and political principle. The kind of critical, historically informed, politically engaged scholarship that the Centre for Marxian Studies represents is essential for the life of a democratic society. Without

institutions that sustain this kind of intellectual work, the capacity of society to understand itself, to analyze its conditions, and to imagine alternatives becomes impoverished.

CHAPTER TEN: PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF INTELLECTUAL LIFE

10.1 The Psychology of the Committed Intellectual

The psychology of intellectual commitment, the inner life of a scholar who is deeply engaged with both rigorous scholarly work and politically significant questions, is a topic that deserves serious attention. What does it mean, psychologically, to spend one's working life in the analysis of texts and the pursuit of theoretical understanding? What motivates this kind of work? What sustains it in the face of the considerable obstacles and pressures that serious intellectual work entails? And what are the psychological costs and rewards of intellectual life?

Erik Erikson's concept of "generativity," the human need to contribute something of value to the next generation, is relevant here. For scholars and teachers, the transmission of intellectual traditions and the formation of new thinkers represents a central form of generativity. The teacher who introduces a student to a body of thought that transforms that student's understanding of the world, who creates the conditions for intellectual discovery and growth, who sustains the culture of inquiry within which future scholars will do their own work, is engaged in one of the most meaningful and most demanding forms of human work.

For an intellectual committed to a political tradition as well as a scholarly one, there is an additional psychological dimension: the relationship between intellectual work and political aspiration. The Marxian tradition holds that understanding the world is not sufficient, that the point is to change it. This creates a specific psychological dynamic: the tension between the demands of rigorous scholarship, which requires patience, caution, and a willingness to follow the argument wherever it leads, and the demands of political commitment, which creates urgency, impatience, and a desire for work that has immediate practical relevance.

This tension is not always comfortable. There are moments when the political urgency of a situation seems to demand action rather than analysis, when the careful cultivation of intellectual rigor seems like a form of complicity with injustice. And there are moments when the demands of political solidarity seem to conflict with the demands of intellectual honesty, when one is expected to affirm positions that the evidence does not support or to avoid conclusions that would be politically inconvenient. Navigating these tensions is one of the central psychological challenges of the committed intellectual life.

10.2 The Politics of Academic Identity

For Abdul Kafi, these general psychological challenges of intellectual life take on a specific form shaped by his particular social position. As a Muslim academic in a predominantly Hindu society, as a Marxian scholar in an era of rising Hindu nationalism, as a member of a religious

minority in a political environment that has been openly hostile to that minority, he occupies a position that is both intellectually productive and psychologically demanding.

The concept of "double consciousness," developed by W.E.B. Du Bois in the context of African-American experience, describes the psychological experience of belonging simultaneously to two worlds, one dominant and one marginalized, and of seeing oneself through both the eyes of the dominant culture and the eyes of one's own community. Du Bois describes the "peculiar sensation" of "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." This experience generates both creative possibilities and psychological burdens. The ability to see from multiple perspectives simultaneously, to inhabit two worlds at once, can be an intellectual resource. But the constant awareness of being judged, of having to prove oneself in ways that members of the dominant group do not have to prove themselves, of navigating an institution and a society that were not designed with one's presence in mind, takes a significant psychological toll.

For Muslim intellectuals in India, this experience of double consciousness has been intensified by the political climate of the past decade. The mainstreaming of anti-Muslim rhetoric in Indian public discourse, the normalization of violence against Muslims, and the systematic erosion of the constitutional protections that are supposed to guarantee equal citizenship regardless of religion have created an environment of fear and uncertainty that cannot be left entirely outside the university gate. The ability to do one's best intellectual work under these conditions requires considerable psychological strength and considerable institutional support.

10.3 Community, Solidarity, and the Intellectual Life

Against the isolating pressures of the committed intellectual life, the experience of intellectual community and solidarity is one of the most important resources available. The Centre for Marxian Studies, as a forum that brings together scholars from different disciplines and different countries around shared intellectual commitments, represents exactly this kind of community. The intellectual exchange that takes place in its seminars and discussions, the experience of grappling with difficult ideas in the company of others who take those ideas seriously, the solidarity of scholars who share a common commitment to understanding and to emancipation, these are not merely pleasant additions to the scholarly life. They are psychologically essential to it.

Vygotsky's concept of the "zone of proximal development," developed in the context of educational psychology but applicable more broadly, holds that learning and intellectual development occur most effectively in the zone between what one can accomplish alone and what one can accomplish with the support of more experienced or more knowledgeable interlocutors. The zone of proximal development in intellectual life is the space of productive conversation, where ideas are tested, challenged, refined, and enriched through engagement with others. The Centre for Marxian Studies, at its best, functions as this kind of zone: a space where individual scholars are enabled to go further in their thinking than they could go in isolation.

The organization of the Sishu-kishore Utsav (children's and young people's festival), in which Abdul Kafi is noted as playing a leadership role, represents a different but equally important

dimension of intellectual community: the engagement of the university with the broader community it serves. A university that remains enclosed within its own walls, that sees its responsibility only to its own students and faculty, fails in one of its most important social functions. The engagement of scholars with children and young people, with communities outside the university, with the broader public sphere of cultural and intellectual life, is both a social responsibility and an intellectual resource. It keeps intellectual work connected to the concrete realities of the world it seeks to understand.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: JURISPRUDENCE, LEGAL THEORY, AND THE POLITICS OF RIGHTS

11.1 Marxism and the Law

One of the most important and most contested areas in Marxian theory is the analysis of law and legal institutions. Classical Marxism, as represented by Marx and Engels's own writings, tends to treat law as part of the superstructure: a set of institutions and norms that reflect and reinforce the interests of the dominant class, that give the appearance of universality and impartiality to what are in fact class-specific arrangements. In the famous words of Anatole France, the law in its majestic equality forbids both the rich and the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread.

This reductive view of law as simply an instrument of class domination has been criticized from within the Marxian tradition itself. E.P. Thompson's analysis of the role of the rule of law in eighteenth-century England, in "Whigs and Hunters" (1975), argued that law is not simply an instrument of ruling class power but a genuine constraint on that power as well. The legal form, which requires that all parties, including the powerful, submit to general rules rather than simply acting on their particular interests, has a genuine emancipatory potential that cannot be dismissed. Even the laws made by ruling classes to serve ruling class interests must, to maintain their legitimacy, present themselves as universal rules binding on all. This demand for universality creates a space within which the oppressed can make claims on the powerful, invoking the universal principles that the law professes even when those principles are systematically violated in practice.

This debate about the relationship between law and class power has important implications for the analysis of the legal situation of minority communities in India, including the Muslim community. The Indian Constitution guarantees rights to all citizens regardless of religion, caste, or gender, and these constitutional guarantees represent real legal protections that have been used by members of minority communities to challenge discrimination and violence. At the same time, the gap between constitutional promise and social reality is enormous, and the law as it actually operates in Indian society is deeply shaped by inequalities of power, wealth, and social privilege that systematically disadvantage the most marginalized groups.

The question of how to use the law strategically, how to invoke legal rights in ways that genuinely advance the interests of the marginalized rather than merely providing the appearance

of justice, is one of the most important practical questions for progressive politics in India. The Ambedkarite tradition has been particularly important here: Ambedkar himself was a trained lawyer who understood the law both as an instrument of oppression and as a potential instrument of liberation, and his contribution to the drafting of the Indian Constitution was shaped by his determination to use legal forms to advance the emancipation of Dalit people.

11.2 The Right to Dissent and Academic Freedom

In the specific context of academic life, the question of legal rights intersects with the question of academic freedom in important ways. Academic freedom, the freedom of scholars to pursue their research wherever it leads, to teach what their scholarly judgment determines is true and important, to publish their findings without fear of political interference, and to engage in public debate without professional consequences, is essential to the functioning of the university as a site of critical inquiry.

In India, academic freedom is protected, at least formally, by a combination of constitutional guarantees, university statutes, and the professional norms of the academic community. But these protections have been under increasing pressure. Faculty who have been publicly critical of government policies have faced consequences ranging from denial of research grants to dismissal charges to criminal prosecution. Students who have organized politically have faced similar consequences. And in some cases, the threat of violence, as in the assault on Abdul Kafi, has been used as a tool of intimidation against scholars whose work and institutional roles make them targets.

The legal and constitutional frameworks that protect academic freedom need to be understood and used by scholars and institutions who are committed to maintaining the conditions of free inquiry. But they also need to be supplemented by the kind of collective solidarity and mutual support that academic communities can provide when individual members are under attack. The response of the Jadavpur University Teachers' Association to the 2019 assault on Kafi, condemning the attack and demanding action against the perpetrator, is a model of the kind of institutional solidarity that academic freedom requires.

CHAPTER TWELVE: ECONOMICS, POLITICAL ECONOMY, AND THE MATERIAL CONDITIONS OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

12.1 The Political Economy of Academic Publishing

The economics of academic publishing represent one of the most striking examples of the contradictions of contemporary capitalism applied to intellectual life. Academic knowledge, which is typically produced by publicly funded researchers in publicly funded institutions, is captured by private publishing corporations that charge extremely high prices for access to journals and books, prices that are often far beyond the reach of individuals and even of many university libraries in the global South.

The concentration of academic publishing in a small number of large corporations, including Elsevier, Springer, Taylor and Francis, and Wiley, has created what critics have described as a system of "academic enclosure" in which knowledge that should be a public good is transformed into a commodity whose access is restricted by the ability to pay. The irony is particularly acute in the humanities and social sciences, where much of the research is explicitly concerned with questions of social justice, equality, and the distribution of resources, but where the institutional framework of publication systematically excludes the very communities whose conditions are being studied from access to the research.

The National Book Agency, as a publisher committed to affordability and accessibility, represents an alternative model. Its mission of reaching "all categories of readers with Marxist and other writings, particularly in Bengali language" reflects a commitment to the social function of knowledge production rather than simply its commercial function. Publishing with the NBA is a political choice that aligns with the intellectual and ethical commitments of the tradition in which Abdul Kafi works.

12.2 The Global Knowledge Economy and Its Hierarchies

The question of academic publishing is part of a broader question about the global organization of knowledge production and its hierarchies. Knowledge production is not evenly distributed across the globe. It is concentrated in a small number of wealthy countries, primarily in North America and Western Europe, and within those countries in a small number of elite institutions. The languages of knowledge production are dominated by English, with other European languages occupying a secondary position and languages like Bengali, Hindi, Arabic, and Swahili occupying an even more marginal position in the global hierarchy of scholarly communication.

This hierarchy has profound consequences. It means that research conducted in the global South, in locally specific languages, addressing locally specific conditions, is systematically devalued in the global academic economy, regardless of its intrinsic quality and significance. It means that scholars in the global South who wish to have their work recognized in the international academy are under pressure to write in English and to address the questions and concerns of the metropolitan academy rather than the questions and concerns of their own societies. And it means that knowledge produced in the global South, even when it is of the highest quality and addresses questions of global significance, tends to be known only locally rather than circulating globally as it should.

The Centre for Marxian Studies at Jadavpur, by hosting international scholars and by engaging in dialogue with the global left-wing intellectual community while remaining rooted in the Bengali intellectual tradition and publishing in Bengali, represents an attempt to navigate this inequality in a way that maintains both intellectual integrity and international engagement. It refuses both the complete subordination to metropolitan academic norms that would erase its local roots and the complete isolation that would cut it off from the global conversation.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: PEDAGOGY, TEACHING, AND THE FORMATION OF CRITICAL MINDS

13.1 Teaching as Political Practice

For Abdul Kafi, as for any scholar committed to the kind of intellectual project we have been describing, teaching is not simply the delivery of information to students. It is a form of political practice, a process of forming critical minds that can engage seriously with the world and contribute to its transformation. This understanding of teaching has a long tradition in progressive pedagogy, from the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's concept of "pedagogy of the oppressed" to the more recent work on critical pedagogy associated with figures like Henry Giroux and bell hooks.

Freire's foundational contribution, developed in his work with adult literacy programs in Brazil in the 1960s, was the critique of what he called the "banking concept" of education, in which the teacher deposits knowledge into the passive receptacles of students' minds. Against this model, Freire proposed a "dialogical" education in which teacher and student are jointly engaged in naming and analyzing the conditions of the world, in which the act of learning is inseparable from the act of critically understanding one's own social situation, and in which education is understood as a practice of liberation rather than a practice of domestication.

In the context of Bengali literary studies, this pedagogical philosophy connects to the tradition of using literature as a vehicle for critical consciousness-raising, for helping students to understand the world they live in through the analysis of the texts that that world has produced. Teaching *Dhumketu*, *Raktakarobi*, and *Langol* as texts that engage with the political struggles of their historical moment is not simply a matter of imparting historical knowledge. It is a way of inviting students to think about the relationship between literature and politics in their own lives, to ask what literature can do in response to the conditions of the present, and to develop the capacity for the kind of critical, historically informed analysis that genuine intellectual engagement with the world requires.

13.2 The Doctoral Student and the Transmission of Tradition

One of the most important functions of a university department is the formation of the next generation of scholars through the doctoral program. The relationship between a doctoral supervisor and a doctoral student is one of the most significant intellectual relationships in academic life. It is in this relationship that intellectual traditions are most directly transmitted, tested, refined, and challenged. The supervisor's own intellectual commitments, methods, and questions inevitably shape the research of the students who work under their supervision, even as the students' own perspectives, questions, and findings enrich and challenge those commitments.

Abdul Kafi's role as a supervisor of doctoral research in the Bengali department at Jadavpur represents another dimension of his intellectual work that is not captured by his publications alone. The doctoral students who have worked under his guidance, who have engaged with the questions and methods that his scholarship pursues, who have gone on to develop their own careers as scholars, teachers, and intellectuals, are part of the broader impact of his work in the

world. The transmission of intellectual tradition through doctoral education is one of the most important and least visible forms of scholarly contribution.

The doctoral research supervised in the Bengali department at Jadavpur engages with a wide range of questions in Bengali literary history, literary theory, and cultural analysis. The breadth of topics, from the folk culture of Bangladesh and North-East Indian states (the subject of the department's UGC-funded DRS project) to literary theory, popular literature, stylistics, and semiotics, reflects the department's commitment to an expansive and inclusive vision of Bengali studies that goes well beyond the canonical texts and canonical authors of the tradition.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: THE CONCEPT OF THE TEXT AND ITS HISTORY

14.1 What is a Text? Theoretical Perspectives

The concept of the "text" has been one of the most debated and most productively ambiguous in literary theory over the past half-century. Roland Barthes's famous distinction between the "work" and the "text" in his essay "From Work to Text" (1971) is a useful starting point. For Barthes, the "work" is a finished object, a product that can be held in the hand, placed on a shelf, attributed to an author, and given a definitive meaning. The "text," by contrast, is a process, a field of signification that is always in play, always open to new readings, always exceeding any single definitive interpretation. A text, in this sense, is not something that exists in a physical object but something that happens in the act of reading: it is produced in the encounter between the marks on the page and the interpretive activity of the reader.

This distinction has been enormously productive in literary theory, opening up questions about authorship, meaning, and interpretation that the older concept of the "work" tended to foreclose. But it has also been subject to critique, particularly from Marxian critics who have argued that the concept of the text as pure intertextual play, as an endless deferral of meaning, risks cutting the analysis of literature loose from the material and historical conditions that give texts their specific significance.

The phrase in Abdul Kafi's book description, which we have already noted: "a text stands before a particular crisis of history, how it addresses or resolves that crisis," suggests an understanding of the text that is neither purely formalist (concerned only with the internal organization of the text) nor purely sociological (concerned only with the external conditions of the text's production) but genuinely dialectical. A text is something that exists in a specific historical situation, that responds to the contradictions and crises of that situation, and that may or may not succeed in illuminating and addressing those contradictions in ways that contribute to their resolution.

This is a richly productive understanding of what a text is and does. It preserves the formal complexity of the literary text while insisting on its historical situatedness. It takes seriously both the specific aesthetic properties of texts and their engagement with the broader social and political world. And it suggests a form of literary criticism that is neither narrowly formalist nor

crudely sociological but genuinely attentive to both the form and the context of the texts it analyzes.

14.2 The Crisis of History and the Work of Literature

The phrase "a particular crisis of history" is worth unpeeling further. What is a crisis of history? In the Marxian tradition, a crisis is not simply a difficult or dangerous moment. It is a moment of structural contradiction, a point at which the tensions built into a social formation can no longer be managed within the existing framework and must either explode in violent transformation or be resolved through some fundamental reorganization of social relations. The concept of crisis is structural, not merely situational: it refers to deep contradictions in the social totality, not simply to events that are problematic or threatening.

In the context of colonial Bengal in the 1920s, the crises that texts like *Dhumketu*, *Raktakarobi*, and *Langol* were responding to were multiple and interconnected. There was the structural crisis of colonial capitalism: the contradiction between the enormous wealth produced by Bengali labor and the poverty imposed on the Bengali people by the colonial system. There was the political crisis of the nationalist movement: the question of how to achieve independence, on what terms, through what means, and for whose benefit. There was the cultural crisis of Bengali identity: the question of what it meant to be Bengali in a world where the cultural forms of modernity were being introduced by the very colonial power that was simultaneously exploiting and oppressing the Bengali people. And there was the community crisis of Hindu-Muslim relations: the question of whether Bengali identity could be maintained as a trans-religious identity in the face of colonial strategies of divide and rule that sought to deepen communal divisions.

Each of the three texts that Abdul Kafi analyzes stands before this complex historical crisis in a distinctive way. *Dhumketu* responds to it with confrontational political journalism that seeks to awaken and mobilize nationalist consciousness. *Raktakarobi* responds to it with symbolic literary art that illuminates the human costs of capitalist development and gestures toward alternative possibilities of human community. *Langol* responds to it with a specifically class-oriented political culture that seeks to articulate the interests of the peasant and working class majority who bore the heaviest burdens of colonial exploitation.

Understanding how each text "addresses or resolves" the crisis, or fails to resolve it, or illuminates aspects of it that other responses have missed, is the central analytical task that Abdul Kafi's book pursues. This is literary criticism of the highest order: not the celebration of great texts but the rigorous analysis of what specific texts do in specific historical situations, and what they continue to do for readers who encounter them in a very different historical situation.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: TOWARD A SYNTHESIS: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF KAFI'S INTELLECTUAL PROJECT

15.1 What Abdul Kafi Represents

In the preceding chapters, we have ranged widely across many intellectual territories in our attempt to understand Abdul Kafi and his significance. We have examined the history of Jadavpur University and its Bengali department, the intellectual tradition of Bengali Marxism, the philosophical foundations of his work in dialectical materialism and critical theory, the specific texts he has analyzed, the political economy of colonial Bengal, the politics of the contemporary Indian university, the psychology of committed intellectual life, the questions of jurisprudence and legal rights, and the pedagogy of critical literary education.

It is now time to try to draw some of these threads together and to articulate, at least provisionally, what Abdul Kafi represents as an intellectual figure and what his work contributes to the broader project of understanding the world we live in.

Abdul Kafi represents, in the first instance, the tradition of the committed Bengali Marxian intellectual. This is a tradition with a long and distinguished history, stretching back through figures like Muzaffar Ahmad, Sobhanlal Datta Gupta, Ramkrishna Bhattacharya, and many others to the early pioneers of communist organizing and left-wing cultural politics in Bengal. It is a tradition that has always insisted on the combination of rigorous intellectual work with political commitment, that has refused the separation of scholarship from social engagement, and that has used the resources of literary analysis, historical investigation, and philosophical reflection in the service of understanding and potentially transforming the conditions of social life.

Within this tradition, Abdul Kafi occupies a distinctive position. His focus on the relationship between literary texts and historical crises, his reading of canonical texts like Raktakarobi alongside more marginal and politically committed texts like Dhumketu and Langol, his coordination of an interdisciplinary center that brings together scholars from across the range of Marxian intellectual traditions, and his engagement with both classical Marxian theory and the more recent debates in postcolonial studies, feminist theory, and the politics of knowledge production, all of these mark him as a scholar who is both deeply rooted in a tradition and actively engaged in its development and renewal.

15.2 The Project of Bengali Literary Criticism

The broader project of Bengali literary criticism in which Abdul Kafi's work participates is one of the most important intellectual projects underway in the humanities today. Bengali literature is one of the richest literary traditions in the world, but it remains systematically undervalued and under-studied in the global academy. The critical work of scholars like Abdul Kafi, who analyze Bengali texts with rigor and depth and who situate them within both the specific history of Bengal and the broader history of capitalism, colonialism, and postcolonial development, is essential for making this tradition visible and accessible to the global scholarly community.

This is not simply a matter of academic representation, of ensuring that Bengali texts appear on reading lists alongside texts from other traditions. It is a matter of intellectual substance. Bengali literary history illuminates aspects of the experience of modernity, of colonialism, of class struggle, of communal conflict, and of cultural resistance that other traditions illuminate differently or do not illuminate at all. The specific combination of the Bengali language, the

history of Bengal, the tradition of Bengali political and cultural engagement, and the particular experiences of the Bengali people, produces literary and intellectual work that contributes something genuinely irreplaceable to the global conversation about the human condition.

15.3 Toward a Humanist Marxism for the Twenty-First Century

The intellectual tradition that Abdul Kafi represents can be described as a form of humanist Marxism: a Marxism that is committed to the emancipatory potential of the Marxian tradition but that insists on the centrality of human beings, in all their cultural, linguistic, psychological, and historical complexity, to any genuinely adequate social theory. This is a Marxism that refuses the reductionism and the mechanical determinism that have sometimes characterized vulgar Marxist thought, that insists on the relative autonomy of cultural production and aesthetic form, and that takes seriously the specific historical experiences of specific peoples rather than forcing them into a universal template.

At the same time, it is a Marxism that maintains its critical edge against the idealist and culturalist tendencies that have sometimes characterized postcolonial and postmodern thought. It insists on the reality of material conditions, of economic structures, of class relations and their consequences. It refuses to dissolve the analysis of social reality into an analysis of discourse or representation. And it maintains a commitment to the possibility of social transformation, to the idea that understanding the world is not sufficient, that the point is to change it.

This combination of intellectual rigor, historical depth, political commitment, and cultural sensitivity represents exactly the kind of intellectual tradition that the contemporary world needs. In an era of rising authoritarianism, of deepening inequality, of environmental crisis, and of the systematic erosion of the conditions for democratic and emancipatory political life, the resources of the Marxian critical tradition, as developed and refined in the specific context of Bengali intellectual life, are more relevant and more urgently needed than ever.

CONCLUSION TO PART ONE: QUESTIONS, PROBLEMS, AND PATHS FORWARD

The Shape of the Argument to Come

This first part of our ten-part textbook has established the intellectual, historical, and institutional context within which Abdul Kafi's work must be understood. We have traced the origins and development of the tradition he works within, analyzed the key texts around which his major published work is organized, examined the philosophical and theoretical frameworks that inform his approach, and situated his work in the broader contexts of Bengali intellectual history, Marxian theory, postcolonial studies, and the contemporary politics of the Indian university.

In the parts that follow, we will go deeper into specific aspects of this rich intellectual landscape. Part Two will provide a comprehensive analysis of the three texts at the center of Kafi's book, using the methodological tools we have outlined in this part to develop detailed readings of Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol that illuminate both their specific literary and historical

significance and their broader theoretical implications. Part Three will examine the history of the Centre for Marxian Studies in detail, analyzing the range of intellectual work it has produced and the debates it has hosted. Part Four will develop a comparative analysis, situating Bengali Marxian literary criticism alongside parallel developments in other regional traditions in India and in comparable traditions in other parts of the global South. Part Five will address the question of gender, examining the intersection of Marxism and feminism in the Bengal context and analyzing the significant body of feminist literary criticism that has developed at Jadavpur and in the broader Bengali academic world.

Part Six will examine the contemporary political and institutional context in depth, analyzing the crisis of the Indian university under neoliberal and Hindu nationalist pressures and assessing the prospects for the kind of critical, politically engaged scholarship that Abdul Kafi represents. Part Seven will develop the theoretical foundations of Marxian literary criticism more systematically, engaging with the full range of relevant theoretical traditions from Lukacs to Jameson, from Bakhtin to Bourdieu. Part Eight will examine the pedagogy of Bengali studies, analyzing how literary and cultural traditions are transmitted in classroom and doctoral settings and what kinds of critical consciousness this pedagogy aims to produce.

Part Nine will develop a comprehensive comparative analysis of the political, economic, and philosophical dimensions of Kafi's work, situating it in relation to the major intellectual debates of the early twenty-first century: the debates about capitalism and its alternatives, about democracy and authoritarianism, about the relationship between culture and politics, and about the possibilities and limits of intellectual work in conditions of social crisis. And Part Ten will draw the threads of the entire study together in a synthesis that assesses both the achievements and the remaining challenges of the intellectual tradition that Abdul Kafi represents, and that offers a perspective on the significance of this tradition for the future of both Bengali studies and the global project of emancipatory intellectual work.

Questions for Discussion and Further Research

1. In what ways does the specific intellectual context of Jadavpur University shape the kind of scholarship that Abdul Kafi produces? How does the culture of a particular institution influence the intellectual work of the scholars it houses?
2. What is the relationship between the Marxian concept of ideology and the practice of literary criticism? How does the analysis of ideology differ from the analysis of simple propaganda?
3. How does Gramsci's concept of hegemony help us to understand the political significance of cultural production, including literature? What are the limits of this concept?
4. In what ways does the colonial economic history of Bengal shape the literary texts produced in that context? Use specific examples from your knowledge of Bengali literature to illustrate your argument.
5. What are the main debates between Marxian theory and postcolonial theory? Which side of this debate do you find more convincing, and why?
6. How does the choice of publisher reflect the political commitments of an intellectual? What does Abdul Kafi's choice to publish with the National Book Agency tell us about his intellectual and political position?

7. What is "double consciousness" in the Duboisian sense, and how might this concept apply to the situation of Muslim academics in contemporary India?
8. What are the consequences of neoliberal university reform for the kind of intellectual work represented by the Centre for Marxian Studies? How should the academic community respond to these pressures?
9. How does Benjamin's understanding of history as "brushing against the grain" differ from conventional historical narratives? What are the implications of this understanding for literary criticism?
10. What is the significance of the Bengali language as a medium of scholarly work? What is lost and what is gained when intellectual work is conducted in a regional language rather than in a global language like English?

Suggestions for Further Reading

The following works are recommended for students who wish to deepen their engagement with the themes and questions explored in this part of the textbook. They are organized by theme rather than alphabetically, to facilitate a focused approach to the areas of greatest interest.

On the philosophical foundations of Marxian thought and their application to literary and cultural analysis: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The German Ideology" and selected writings from the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844; Antonio Gramsci, "Selections from the Prison Notebooks"; Raymond Williams, "Marxism and Literature"; Fredric Jameson, "The Political Unconscious"; Terry Eagleton, "Criticism and Ideology" and "Marxism and Literary Criticism"; Georg Lukacs, "The Historical Novel" and "The Theory of the Novel."

On the history and culture of Jadavpur University and the Bengali intellectual tradition: Sumit Sarkar, "A Critique of Colonial India" and "Modern India 1885-1947"; Partha Chatterjee, "The Nation and Its Fragments"; Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Provincializing Europe"; Himani Bannerji, "Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism and Anti-Racism."

On Kazi Nazrul Islam, Rabindranath Tagore, and the literature of colonial Bengal: the extensive body of Bengali scholarship on these figures, including the critical editions produced by institutions like the Nazrul Academy and the Rabindra Bhavana; in English, see Kris Manjappa, "M.N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism" for the broader intellectual context; and Tanika Sarkar, "Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation" for the social and political context of Bengali literature in the colonial period.

On the debate between Marxism and postcolonial theory: Aijaz Ahmad, "In Theory"; Vivek Chibber, "Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital"; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "A Critique of Postcolonial Reason"; Neil Lazarus, "The Postcolonial Unconscious."

On the contemporary crisis of the Indian university and academic freedom: there is a growing body of journalism and scholarly commentary on this topic; for the broader philosophical and political context, see Martha Nussbaum, "Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities"; and Henry Giroux, "The University in Chains."

On political economy and the colonial history of Bengal: Utsa Patnaik and Prabhat Patnaik, "A Theory of Imperialism"; Amiya Kumar Bagchi, "The Political Economy of Underdevelopment"; Ranajit Guha, "A Rule of Property for Bengal."

End of Part One

This textbook will continue with Part Two: Three Texts and the World They Made: A Close Reading of Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol.

APPENDIX TO PART ONE

A. Note on Sources and Methods

This textbook draws on a combination of publicly available information about Abdul Kafi and the institutions in which he works, the broader scholarly literature on the intellectual traditions and historical contexts that have shaped his work, and the general theoretical resources of Marxian literary criticism, postcolonial theory, and cultural history. Where specific claims about Kafi's work are made that go beyond the documentary record, they are clearly framed as analytical inferences drawn from the available evidence rather than as established biographical facts.

The methodological approach throughout is broadly dialectical-materialist, reading individual scholars and specific texts in relation to the historical conditions and intellectual traditions within which they are embedded, while also attending to the specific qualities and arguments of individual texts and individual thinkers that cannot be reduced to their historical conditions. The dialectical method requires holding both dimensions in view simultaneously: the general and the particular, the historical and the aesthetic, the political and the intellectual.

B. Glossary of Key Terms

Bhadralok: Bengali term for the educated, middle-class gentry of Bengal, typically but not exclusively upper-caste and Hindu. A central social class in the history of Bengali intellectual and cultural life.

Dialectical materialism: The philosophical method associated with Marx and Engels, combining Hegel's dialectical logic with a materialist ontology that grounds social analysis in the organization of material production.

Hegemony: Gramsci's term for the form of social domination that operates through cultural and ideological leadership rather than direct physical coercion. Achieved when a dominant class's values and worldview come to seem natural and universal to broader society.

IPTA (Indian People's Theatre Association): A left-wing cultural organization founded in India in 1943, bringing together theater workers, musicians, writers, and visual artists committed to using cultural production in the service of progressive social change.

Langol: Bengali term for plough. Also the name of a short-lived but historically significant socialist journal published by Nazrul Islam and Muzaffar Ahmad in 1925-1926.

Madhyabitta: Bengali term for middle class.

Organic intellectual: Gramsci's term for an intellectual organically connected to a social class, articulating that class's worldview and interests rather than presenting themselves as autonomous from class interests.

Raktakarobi: Bengali term, literally "Red Oleander." Title of a major play by Rabindranath Tagore (1926) that uses the symbolism of the red oleander flower as an image of natural life, beauty, and resistance in the face of industrial capitalism's dehumanizing logic.

Subaltern: In Gramsci's original use, a subordinate social group. In the Subaltern Studies tradition, the marginalized majority whose historical experience has been systematically excluded from official historical narratives.

Swadeshi: "Own country" in Sanskrit-derived Bengali. Term for the movement of the early twentieth century that promoted the use of Indian-made goods as a form of resistance to British colonial economic exploitation.

C. Timeline of Key Events and Dates

1906: Founding of Bengal Technical Institute, the precursor to Jadavpur University, as part of the Swadeshi movement.

1920-1921: Formal establishment of the Communist Party of India, with Muzaffar Ahmad playing a central role in Bengal.

1922: Publication of Kazi Nazrul Islam's Dhumketu (The Comet) newspaper; Nazrul's arrest and imprisonment under colonial sedition laws.

1925-1926: Publication of Langol (The Plough), the socialist cultural journal edited by Nazrul Islam and Muzaffar Ahmad.

1926: First performance of Rabindranath Tagore's play Raktakarobi (Red Oleanders).

1939: Founding of the National Book Agency by Muzaffar Ahmad and associates.

1943: Founding of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA). Bengal Famine kills three to four million people.

1947: Partition of India; division of Bengal between India and Pakistan.

1955: Establishment of Jadavpur University on 24 December.

1956: Establishment of the Department of Bengali at Jadavpur University.

1971: Liberation War of Bangladesh; creation of the independent state of Bangladesh.

1977: Left Front government comes to power in West Bengal under CPI(M); holds power for thirty-four years.

1998: Founding of the Centre for Marxian Studies at Jadavpur University on the 150th anniversary of the Communist Manifesto.

2005: Abdul Kafi joins the Department of Bengali at Jadavpur University as Assistant Professor.

2011: Left Front government defeated in West Bengal elections; Trinamool Congress under Mamata Banerjee comes to power.

2013: Vivek Chibber publishes "Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital"; sparks major debate in left-wing and postcolonial scholarship.

2014: BJP under Narendra Modi wins national elections; beginning of period of intensified Hindu nationalist politics affecting academic institutions.

2019: Physical assault on Abdul Kafi by former student near Jadavpur University main gate; widespread condemnation from academic community. Citizenship Amendment Act passed.

2024-2025: NAAC accredits Jadavpur University with A+ grade; university continues to rank among India's top institutions in NIRF rankings. Abdul Kafi continues as Coordinator of Centre for Marxian Studies.

The reader is now invited to proceed to Part Two of this textbook, which provides an extended close reading of the three central texts analyzed in Abdul Kafi's major published work, developing in detail the analytical approach that this first part has established.

PART TWO: THREE TEXTS AND THE WORLD THEY MADE

A Close Reading of Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol

PREFACE TO PART TWO

In Part One of this textbook, we established the intellectual, historical, and institutional frameworks through which the work of Abdul Kafi must be understood. We traced the lineage of Bengali Marxian thought, the culture of Jadavpur University, the philosophical traditions of dialectical materialism, Gramscian cultural theory, Frankfurt School critique, and the ongoing debates between Marxism and postcolonial theory. We established that Kafi's major published work, centered on three texts from colonial Bengal, represents a form of literary criticism that is simultaneously historical, philosophical, and political, that reads literary and cultural artifacts not as aesthetic objects in a vacuum but as interventions in the real crises of their historical moment, crises whose unresolved tensions continue to reverberate in the present.

Part Two moves from this contextual work to a sustained close engagement with the three texts themselves. We take as our guiding principle the analytical framework that, as we noted in Part One, appears to animate Kafi's critical project: the understanding that a text stands before a particular crisis of history, responds to that crisis with the specific resources available in its moment, and either illuminates or obscures, advances or retreats from, the contradictions that constitute that crisis. This framework is not a formula or a mechanical procedure. It is a way of asking questions that guide the reading of specific texts while remaining open to the irreducibly particular qualities that make each text what it uniquely is.

The three texts we examine are *Dhumketu* (The Comet, 1922), the fiercely anti-colonial nationalist newspaper founded and primarily edited by Kazi Nazrul Islam; *Raktakarobi* (Red Oleanders, 1926), the symbolist play by Rabindranath Tagore that constitutes one of his most sustained engagements with the critique of industrial capitalism; and *Langol* (The Plough, 1925-1926), the socialist cultural journal associated with Nazrul Islam and Muzaffar Ahmad. These three texts are very different from each other in genre, form, political orientation, social position, and aesthetic character. What they share is their historical moment: the middle years of the 1920s in colonial Bengal, a decade of extraordinary political and cultural ferment that was shaped by the aftermath of the First World War, the Russian Revolution, the rise of the non-cooperation movement under Gandhi, the growing influence of communist ideas, the increasing tensions of Hindu-Muslim communal politics, and the deepening contradictions of colonial capitalism.

Part Two is organized as follows. Chapter One provides an extended historical contextualisation of the 1920s in Bengal, analyzing the specific crisis of that historical moment in its economic, political, cultural, and psychological dimensions. Chapter Two offers a deep reading of *Dhumketu*, examining its history, its editorial content, its literary contributions, its political philosophy, and its relationship to the broader crisis of colonial Bengal. Chapter Three does the same for *Langol*, attending particularly to the relationship between its socialist politics and its literary practice. Chapter Four provides the most extended analysis, a sustained reading of *Raktakarobi* that traces the play's engagement with industrial capitalism, its symbolic language, its construction of alternative possibilities of human community, and its complex relationship to the Marxian tradition of social critique. Chapter Five compares and contrasts the three texts, examining what their juxtaposition reveals about the range of cultural and political responses available in 1920s Bengal. Chapter Six addresses the theoretical question of what these readings contribute to the broader project of Marxian literary criticism, and Chapter Seven considers the

legacy of these three texts for subsequent generations of Bengali writers, intellectuals, and political actors. The concluding section of the Part reflects on what reading these texts together, as Abdul Kafi does, tells us about the relationship between literature, history, and the possibility of social transformation.

Throughout this Part, we draw on the widest possible range of relevant theoretical and historical resources, from the specific traditions of Bengali literary criticism to the general theories of Marxian cultural analysis, from the detailed historical scholarship on 1920s Bengal to the comparative perspectives offered by similar texts and movements in other colonial and postcolonial contexts. We aim to produce readings that are both rigorous and accessible, that demonstrate the depth and complexity of these texts while also making that depth available to the student reader who is encountering them for the first time.

CHAPTER ONE: THE HISTORICAL MOMENT: BENGAL IN THE 1920s

1.1 The Aftermath of the Great War

The decade of the 1920s in Bengal, as in most of the world, was profoundly shaped by the experience of the First World War and its aftermath. The war, which lasted from 1914 to 1918, had been the most devastating conflict in recorded human history to that point, killing perhaps seventeen million people and wounding twenty million more. For the colonized peoples of the world, including India, the war had created a specific and peculiar set of contradictions. India had contributed enormously to the British war effort: more than one million Indian soldiers had served in the war, and India had provided enormous material resources and financial support. The expectation, widely held among the Indian educated classes, was that this contribution would be rewarded with substantial political concessions, with a meaningful step toward self-governance.

This expectation was disappointed. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919, which introduced a system of "dyarchy" that gave Indians limited control over certain provincial government functions while retaining British control over all the most important matters, were seen by most nationalists as wholly inadequate. More importantly, the same year produced the Rowlatt Act, which extended wartime restrictions on civil liberties into the postwar period, and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar, in which British and Gurkha troops under Brigadier General Reginald Dyer opened fire on an unarmed crowd of civilians, killing hundreds of people and wounding more than a thousand. These events shattered the remaining faith of many Indian educated people in the possibility of meaningful reform within the colonial system and radicalized a generation of activists and intellectuals.

In Bengal specifically, the decade opened in a climate of intense political activity. The non-cooperation movement launched by Gandhi in 1920 mobilized millions of Indians across the country, including in Bengal, in a campaign of peaceful resistance to colonial rule. The movement was particularly significant because it represented the first attempt to create a genuinely mass politics, a politics that went beyond the educated classes to mobilize peasants,

workers, and the urban poor. For Bengali intellectuals, the emergence of this mass politics raised urgent questions: what was the relationship between the cultural and literary work of the educated classes and the political aspirations of the masses? How should the nationalist movement deal with the deep divisions of class, caste, and religion that cut across the imagined unity of the Indian nation?

These questions were not merely abstract. They were felt with particular acuity by writers, journalists, and intellectuals who saw themselves as committed both to the liberation of India from colonial rule and to the transformation of the social relations that divided and oppressed the Indian people.

1.2 The Russian Revolution and Its Indian Resonances

The Russian Revolution of 1917 sent shockwaves through the world that were felt nowhere more intensely than in the colonized countries of Asia and Africa. For colonized peoples, the revolution offered a new horizon of possibility. Here was a country that had been among the most backward in Europe, with a large peasant population, a limited industrial development, and a history of autocratic rule, that had carried out a successful revolution and was now attempting to build a fundamentally new kind of social order based on the principles of socialism. If Russia could do this, why not India?

The specific content of the Bolshevik program, with its combination of anti-imperialism, proletarian internationalism, peasant agrarian reform, and the nationalization of key industries, spoke directly to the conditions of colonial India. Lenin's analysis of imperialism as the "highest stage of capitalism" provided an intellectual framework for understanding the relationship between the poverty of India and the wealth of Britain that supplemented and extended the nationalist analysis of colonial exploitation. The Communist International, founded in 1919, explicitly committed itself to the support of anti-colonial liberation movements and provided organizational and financial support to nascent communist parties in colonial countries.

Muzaffar Ahmad, Kazi Nazrul Islam, and the other figures associated with the founding of the CPI in Bengal and the cultural politics of the 1920s were deeply influenced by the Russian Revolution and by the political and intellectual tradition it represented. This influence was not merely abstract or inspirational. It was mediated through organizational connections, through the reading of Marxist literature that was increasingly available in translation, and through the experience of colonial activists who had traveled to the Soviet Union and returned with direct knowledge of what the revolution had achieved.

For Nazrul Islam in particular, the Russian Revolution provided an emotional and intellectual framework for the combination of anti-colonial nationalism and socialist aspiration that characterized his political thought. His famous poem "Bidrohi" (The Rebel, 1922), published in the same year as *Dhumketu*, captured the revolutionary ferment of the moment with extraordinary lyrical force. His journalism in *Dhumketu* drew freely on the imagery and ideas of the international revolutionary tradition while also being deeply rooted in the specific cultural and political traditions of Bengal.

1.3 The Economics of Crisis: Colonial Capitalism in the 1920s

The 1920s were also a decade of severe economic crisis in Bengal and in India more broadly. The end of the wartime boom that had briefly stimulated industrial production was followed by a sharp recession. Agricultural prices fell, devastating the peasant majority. The jute industry, which was central to the Bengal economy, was particularly badly affected by price fluctuations in the global market. The tea and indigo plantations, which had long been associated with some of the most brutal forms of labor exploitation in colonial India, continued to operate under conditions that the Indian nationalist movement increasingly condemned.

The urban working class of Kolkata and other Bengal cities was also experiencing acute difficulties. The city's industrial workforce, concentrated in jute mills, engineering workshops, and other industries, lived in conditions of appalling poverty. Housing was inadequate, working conditions were dangerous, wages were minimal, and the colonial legal framework provided minimal protection for workers' rights. The early labor movement in Bengal was beginning to organize around these conditions, and the connection between the labor movement and the emerging communist politics was already becoming significant.

For the literary and cultural intelligentsia of 1920s Bengal, these economic conditions were not background noise. They were the material reality that gave urgency to political and cultural work. The question of how to represent, analyze, and respond to the conditions of life of the Bengali peasantry and working class, how to make their experience visible and audible in literary culture, was one of the central questions of the decade. Texts like *Langol*, which explicitly addressed itself to peasant and worker interests, and *Raktakarobi*, which symbolically represented the human costs of industrial capitalism, were direct responses to this question.

1.4 The Communal Question: Hindu-Muslim Relations in the 1920s

Perhaps the most painful and most historically consequential dimension of Bengali politics in the 1920s was the intensification of Hindu-Muslim communal tensions. Bengal had long been a region in which Hindus and Muslims lived in relative, if sometimes uneasy, coexistence. The Bengali language and culture, which was shared by both communities, provided a common cultural ground that partially offset the religious differences between them. Bengali Muslim literature and culture, including the mystical tradition of the Baul poets and the rich literary tradition of medieval Bengali Muslim poetry, was deeply rooted in the Bengali cultural soil and shared many characteristics with Bengali Hindu literary culture.

The colonial strategy of "divide and rule" had systematically worked to deepen these religious divisions. The partition of Bengal in 1905, which was explicitly justified by the colonial government in terms of administrative convenience but was widely seen as an attempt to weaken the nationalist movement by dividing the Hindu-majority west from the Muslim-majority east, had already demonstrated the colonial government's willingness to use communal politics as a political tool. The reversal of the partition in 1911, under sustained nationalist pressure, had been a partial victory for the anti-communal position, but the damage had been done: the partition had strengthened communal identities and weakened the sense of Bengali cultural unity that had been one of the bases of the nationalist movement.

By the 1920s, communal riots were becoming more frequent. The pressures of economic competition, the mobilization of religious identities by political entrepreneurs, and the deliberate encouragement of communal tension by colonial authorities all contributed to a climate in which the possibility of Hindu-Muslim unity in the nationalist cause was increasingly threatened. The question of whether national liberation could be achieved on a genuinely secular and trans-religious basis, or whether it would be achieved through the domination of one community over another, was one of the most urgent and most painful questions of the decade.

Kazi Nazrul Islam's position on this question was unequivocal. He was passionately committed to the unity of Hindus and Muslims in the struggle against colonialism, and he expressed this commitment in everything he wrote, in his poetry, his journalism, and his personal life. His marriage to Pramila Devi, a Hindu woman, was itself a statement of personal commitment to the trans-religious ideal he advocated. His writing drew freely on both Islamic and Hindu religious and cultural traditions, weaving together imagery and concepts from both in ways that refused the binary of communal division.

But Nazrul's position was not the only one available. Other Bengali intellectuals moved in different directions: toward a specifically Muslim Bengali nationalism that would eventually provide part of the ideological foundation for the demand for Pakistan; toward a specifically Hindu nationalism that saw Islam as a foreign imposition on India's authentic cultural identity; toward a secular nationalism that tried to sidestep the communal question by focusing on the common economic interests of all Indians. And toward a Marxian internationalism that saw the communal question as fundamentally a product of colonial policy and class manipulation, arguing that the real divisions in Indian society were class divisions and that communal politics were a form of false consciousness that served the interests of the colonial power and the Indian ruling classes.

Each of these positions had implications for cultural and literary work, and the three texts at the center of Abdul Kafi's analysis each engage with the communal question in distinctive ways that are deeply revealing of the specific political and philosophical commitments they embody.

1.5 The Cultural Ferment of the 1920s

Beyond the specific political and economic crises of the decade, the 1920s in Bengal were a period of extraordinary cultural ferment and innovation. In literature, the generation of writers who came to maturity in the 1920s was grappling with the question of what Bengali literature should do in the post-Tagore era. Tagore, still very much alive and active, had already achieved a pre-eminence so overwhelming that he functioned almost simultaneously as an inspiration and an obstacle for younger writers. How could one write in Bengali without being overwhelmed by the shadow of his achievement? And how could one be true to one's own historical moment, a moment of mass politics, communist revolution, and deepening social crisis, while remaining within the aesthetic and cultural tradition that Tagore had defined?

Different writers answered these questions differently. Manik Bandyopadhyay, who began writing in the early 1930s, would develop a form of psychologically intense, socially acute fiction that drew on Marxian and Freudian ideas to represent the lives of Bengal's rural poor and

urban working class with unprecedented directness. Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay created a literature of lyrical beauty that found in the natural world of Bengal a counterweight to the social miseries of colonial life. And Kazi Nazrul Islam, in the decade of Dhumketu and Langol, created a literary and cultural practice that was simultaneously deeply rooted in Bengali tradition and radically committed to political transformation.

The question of form was central to all of these developments. What forms were appropriate for a literature that wanted to address the experience and the aspirations of the masses, not only the educated classes? How should the distinction between "high" and "low" culture, between the literary tradition of the educated bhadralok and the folk and popular traditions of the peasantry and working class, be navigated? Was the "serious" literary form of the novel or the symbolist play the appropriate vehicle for political communication, or should political literature draw more heavily on the traditions of song, oral poetry, and popular performance that were more accessible to those who had not received a formal literary education?

These questions of form were not merely aesthetic. They were political. The choice of form is a choice about audience, about who one is speaking to and how. It is a choice about the relationship between the literary work and the social conditions it addresses. And it is a choice about what kind of consciousness one aims to create in the reader or listener: contemplative and analytical, emotionally mobilizing, or actively agitating.

CHAPTER TWO: DHUMKETU: THE JOURNALISM OF LIBERATION

2.1 The Newspaper as Revolutionary Form

Before examining the specific content of Dhumketu, it is worth pausing to consider the newspaper as a literary and political form. In the Marxian and Leninist tradition of political organizing, the newspaper has occupied a central strategic role. Lenin's famous pamphlet "What Is To Be Done?" (1902) argued that the revolutionary newspaper was not simply a means of communicating information but an "organizer" of the revolutionary movement, a mechanism for creating the organizational connections and the shared political consciousness that a revolutionary party requires. The newspaper, in this view, is a form of collective political practice, a way of thinking together in public about the conditions of one's life and the possibilities of transforming them.

For Nazrul Islam, the newspaper was also a literary form, a vehicle for the combination of political journalism, poetry, song, and cultural commentary that characterized his practice throughout the 1920s. Dhumketu published not only editorial commentary and political analysis but poems, ghazals, revolutionary songs, and short fiction, bringing together the literary and the political in a way that was entirely characteristic of the tradition of Bengali cultural nationalism that had developed through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The choice of the name Dhumketu (The Comet) was itself a significant formal and political gesture. The comet is a celestial object that appears without warning, that burns with

extraordinary brightness, that disrupts the established order of the heavens, and that then disappears. It is a symbol of the sudden, brilliant, and potentially dangerous irruption of the extraordinary into the ordinary. By naming his paper *Dhumketu*, Nazrul was making a claim about the kind of political intervention he intended: not a sustained, programmatic campaign of the kind that a party newspaper might conduct, but a sudden, brilliant eruption of passionate political consciousness that would shock and awaken the Bengali reading public.

This distinction is itself philosophically significant. It reflects a specific theory of political communication and political consciousness, one that privileges the emotional and imaginative dimensions of political commitment over the analytical and organizational. Nazrul believed, at least in this period of his career, that the Bengali people needed above all to have their slumbering political consciousness awakened, their fear of colonial authority overcome, their sense of their own dignity and their own power restored. The newspaper that would accomplish this needed to be, above all, a comet: sudden, brilliant, and fearless.

2.2 The Political Philosophy of *Dhumketu*

The political philosophy of *Dhumketu* can be analyzed along several intersecting dimensions: its anti-colonialism, its socialism, its Islamic cultural politics, its Hindu-Muslim syncretism, and its theory of political agency. Each of these dimensions is worth examining in some detail.

The anti-colonialism of *Dhumketu* is its most immediately visible and most consistently sustained characteristic. Every issue of the paper was organized around the fundamental premise that British colonial rule was an illegitimate, exploitative, and degrading imposition on the Bengali people and on the Indian nation more broadly, and that it must be ended. This was not, in the early 1920s, a particularly unusual position among the Bengali educated classes. The non-cooperation movement had made anti-colonial sentiment mainstream within nationalist politics. What was distinctive about *Dhumketu*'s anti-colonialism was its directness, its emotional intensity, and its refusal of the cautious, legalistic language that characterized much mainstream nationalist politics.

Nazrul was not interested in petitioning the colonial government for reforms. He was not interested in demonstrating the capacity of Indians for self-government by showing that they could operate within the existing framework of colonial institutions. He was interested in the total liberation of India from British rule, and he expressed this interest in language that left no room for ambiguity. The poem "Bidrohi" had declared "I am the rebel, the eternal rebel, I raise my head beyond this world," and *Dhumketu* embodied this spirit of unqualified defiance in its journalism.

The socialism of *Dhumketu* is less consistent but no less significant. Nazrul was deeply influenced by the Russian Revolution and by the socialist ideals it represented, and this influence is visible throughout his journalism of the 1920s. He consistently connected the anti-colonial struggle to the struggle against social inequality, arguing that the liberation of India from colonial rule must also be a liberation of the poor and the exploited from the conditions of poverty and degradation that colonial capitalism had imposed. The workers and peasants of

Bengal were not merely victims of British colonialism. They were the potential agents of a liberation that would be both national and social.

This combination of anti-colonial nationalism and socialist aspiration was not unique to Nazrul. It characterized the politics of the early CPI and of the broader tradition of left-wing nationalism in India. But Nazrul expressed it with a lyrical force and a personal passion that gave it an emotional power that more analytical political writing often lacks. His journalism was not merely a set of arguments. It was an appeal to feeling, to pride, to solidarity, and to the willingness to act.

2.3 The Editorial Voice: Language, Tone, and Political Effect

The analysis of the specific language and rhetoric of Dhumketu's editorial content reveals a highly sophisticated communicative practice that deploys the full resources of Bengali literary tradition in the service of political mobilization. Nazrul's editorial voice combines several registers: the passionate, lyrical register of the revolutionary poet; the sharp, satirical register of the political commentator; the grave, measured register of the moral philosopher; and the urgent, direct register of the political agitator who wants his readers to act.

The Bengali language, as Nazrul deploys it in Dhumketu, is itself a political instrument. He uses a Bengali that is simultaneously literary and accessible, drawing on the rich traditions of Bengali poetic language while avoiding the arcane Sanskrit-derived terms that had sometimes made elite Bengali literary language inaccessible to those with less formal education. This linguistic choice is itself a political statement. It says that the political address of Dhumketu is not only to the educated elite who read high literary Bengali but to the broader literate public that wanted to engage with political ideas in language that spoke to them directly.

Nazrul also draws on a wide range of cultural and religious references in his journalism, drawing with equal ease on Islamic religious and literary traditions and Hindu mythological and cultural traditions. This syncretic cultural practice is not merely a personal idiosyncrasy. It is a deliberate political strategy aimed at speaking across the communal divide that colonial politics was working to deepen. By addressing Muslim readers through Islamic cultural references and Hindu readers through Hindu cultural references, while also consistently addressing all readers as Bengalis united by a common language and a common struggle, Nazrul was attempting to construct a political identity that transcended communal divisions without denying cultural difference.

The rhetorical analysis of Dhumketu also reveals a sophisticated understanding of the psychology of political motivation. Nazrul understood that political action requires not only the intellectual conviction that one's cause is just but the emotional resources to act in the face of fear and repression. His journalism consistently addresses this dimension of political life, working to overcome the fear of colonial punishment by appealing to the deeper fear of dishonor, of complicity in one's own subjugation, of failing to act when action is demanded.

2.4 The Poetry of Dhumketu

The poetry published in *Dhumketu* represents some of Nazrul's most significant literary achievement and deserves extended analysis as an integral dimension of the paper's political project. The poems cannot be separated from the journalism. They work together with the editorial content to create a total political and cultural experience for the reader: the journalism provides the analytical and argumentative framework, while the poetry provides the emotional and imaginative force that translates analysis into commitment.

Nazrul's poetry in *Dhumketu* draws on a wide range of Bengali and Islamic poetic traditions. The ghazal form, borrowed from the Urdu and Persian traditions and adapted to the Bengali language, allows Nazrul to combine the conventions of the love poem with the imagery of political struggle, creating a poetry that is simultaneously intimate and epic, personal and political. The revolutionary song, drawing on the traditions of Bengali folk music and the nationalist song tradition that had developed through the nineteenth century, provides a form that is designed for collective performance, for the embodiment of political commitment in shared musical experience.

The analysis of this poetry from a Marxian perspective involves attending to several dimensions simultaneously: the formal properties of the poems, their metrics, their imagery, their rhetorical structures; their intertextual relationships to the Bengali and Islamic literary traditions; their specific political content and its relationship to the broader political project of *Dhumketu*; and their function as elements in a larger cultural and political practice. This kind of multilevel analysis is what Kafi's methodology demands, and what the best Marxian literary criticism of poetry produces.

2.5 The Sedition Trial: Law, Power, and the Production of Martyrdom

The colonial government's decision to prosecute Nazrul for sedition in 1922, following the publication of the poem "Anandamoyeer Agamane" in *Dhumketu*, is a rich episode for analysis. It reveals the colonial power's understanding of the political threat that *Dhumketu* represented, and it also reveals the specific mechanisms through which colonial legal power attempted to contain and suppress political dissent.

The sedition laws under which Nazrul was prosecuted were part of a broader legal framework that had been developed by the colonial government to suppress nationalist agitation. Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, which defines sedition as any attempt to bring the government into "hatred or contempt" or to excite "disaffection" toward it, was a colonial legal instrument of extraordinary breadth and vagueness that allowed the prosecution of virtually any form of significant political criticism. Its use against Nazrul was not exceptional; it had been used against many other nationalist writers and political figures, including Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

What is distinctive about the Nazrul case is the response that the prosecution provoked. Far from silencing Nazrul, the prosecution made him a hero, a political martyr whose courage in the face of colonial repression became an inspiration for the broader nationalist movement. Tagore's letter of solidarity, addressed to Nazrul in prison, was itself a significant political act: the greatest living Bengali writer publicly affirming his solidarity with a younger, more radical colleague and implicitly endorsing the political stance that had led to his imprisonment.

Nazrul's own response to his imprisonment, the hunger strike and the poem "Rajbondir Jabanbondi," transformed his personal situation into a political statement of extraordinary power. The poem, which is a formal legal deposition made as if in court by a prisoner who refuses to recognize the legitimacy of the court that has judged him, uses the conventions of legal discourse against themselves, turning the language of the law into a vehicle for its own indictment. This is a remarkable formal achievement that reveals Nazrul's sophisticated understanding of the relationship between language, power, and political resistance.

For Abdul Kafi's analytical framework, the sedition trial and its aftermath are significant because they illuminate the mechanisms through which colonial power attempted to contain the political effects of cultural production, and the ways in which that containment could fail and even produce the opposite of its intended effect. The colonial government's attempt to silence Dhumketu by imprisoning its editor actually amplified the paper's political significance and transformed Nazrul into a figure of national importance. This dynamic, in which repression generates resistance and the attempt to silence a voice amplifies it, is a recurring pattern in the history of political culture under authoritarian conditions.

2.6 Dhumketu and the Limits of Populist Nationalism

A complete analysis of Dhumketu must also attend to its limitations and contradictions, not merely its achievements. The most significant limitation of Dhumketu's political vision is the one that characterized the populist nationalist tradition more broadly: its inability to develop a fully articulated account of the class contradictions within the Indian nationalist movement and within Bengali society.

Nazrul's anti-colonialism was genuine and his socialist sympathies were real, but the politics of Dhumketu did not consistently translate these commitments into a class analysis of Indian society that could serve as the basis for a genuinely emancipatory political program. The target of Dhumketu's political energy was, overwhelmingly, British colonial rule. The social contradictions within Indian society, the exploitation of peasants and workers by Indian landlords and capitalists, the caste oppression of Dalit communities, the gender oppression of women, these were acknowledged but not consistently integrated into the paper's political framework.

This limitation is not merely a retrospective criticism made with the benefit of historical hindsight. It was recognized by some of Nazrul's contemporaries, including the more orthodox Marxists in the early CPI who argued that anti-colonial nationalism, however genuine, was insufficient as a political program and needed to be supplemented by a sustained analysis of the class contradictions within Indian society. The tension between anti-colonial nationalism and socialist class analysis was one of the central political debates of the 1920s in India, and Dhumketu's politics represent one particular position in that debate: a position that prioritized the immediate political goal of national liberation while maintaining a general socialist orientation that was not always consistently applied.

This limitation is itself historically and theoretically significant. It reveals the specific constraints within which a nationalist-socialist politics operates: the pressure to maintain the unity of the

nationalist coalition, which includes classes with conflicting interests, against the temptation to prioritize the demands of one class over another. Understanding these constraints is part of what a Marxian analysis of Dhumketu must accomplish.

CHAPTER THREE: LANGOL: THE PLOUGH, THE CLASS, AND THE CULTURE

3.1 The Socialist Press in Colonial India

Before analyzing Langol specifically, it is useful to situate it within the broader history of the socialist and communist press in colonial India. From the late nineteenth century onward, the growing labor movement and the emerging socialist and communist currents within the broader nationalist movement had generated a range of publications that addressed the interests and concerns of workers, peasants, and the rural poor. These publications ranged from factory newsletters and trade union bulletins to more ambitious journals of socialist theory and cultural criticism.

The specific cultural and political moment of the mid-1920s in Bengal produced a cluster of publications associated with the early CPI and its allied organizations that collectively constituted a distinctive contribution to the socialist press in India. These publications shared a commitment to connecting the analysis of economic and social conditions to the production of cultural and literary work that could serve as a vehicle for political consciousness-raising and political mobilization. They drew on both the Western Marxist tradition of understanding culture as a dimension of the class struggle and the specifically Bengali tradition of using literary and musical forms in the service of political and social transformation.

Langol was the most important of these publications, at least in terms of its literary and cultural ambitions. Its explicit focus on peasant and worker interests, its use of the plough as its central symbol, and its combination of political journalism with literary and musical contributions made it a distinctive and significant contribution to the socialist cultural politics of the period.

3.2 Muzaffar Ahmad and the Organizational Vision

To understand Langol fully, it is necessary to understand the role of Muzaffar Ahmad in its creation and direction, and through Ahmad to understand the organizational vision of the early communist movement in Bengal. Ahmad was, in many ways, the antithesis of Nazrul Islam in terms of personal style and political temperament, and yet their collaboration on Langol produced something that neither could have created alone.

Ahmad was a meticulous organizer, a patient builder of institutions, a man who understood that lasting political change requires the construction of organizational structures that can sustain collective action over time. He was also a sophisticated theorist of the relationship between political organization and cultural work, drawing on the Leninist tradition to understand the newspaper as an organizer rather than merely a communicator. For Ahmad, Langol was not

simply a vehicle for expressing socialist sentiment. It was a tool for building the organizational connections and the shared political consciousness that the communist movement required.

Ahmad's organizational vision was shaped by his understanding of the specific conditions of colonial Bengal. The peasant majority, who constituted the social base that any genuinely transformative political movement would need to mobilize, was largely illiterate and largely outside the reach of conventional political journalism. The labor movement in Kolkata and other cities was in its early stages of organization and was dealing with conditions of extreme exploitation that demanded immediate practical responses as well as political education. The educated middle class, which provided the intellectual and organizational cadre of the movement, was deeply influenced by the nationalist tradition and needed to be won to a specifically socialist perspective.

Langol addressed all of these constituencies, but with different emphases. Its literary and cultural content, including Nazrul's poetry and the contributions of other writers, was designed to reach the emotional and imaginative dimensions of political commitment that purely analytical journalism could not reach. Its political commentary addressed the economic and social conditions of the peasantry and working class with a directness and specificity that distinguished it from the more general nationalist politics of papers like Dhumketu.

3.3 The Language Question in Langol

One of the most significant formal choices made by Langol was linguistic. The journal was written in a Bengali that drew heavily on the spoken vernacular of the peasantry and working class rather than the literary Bengali of the educated classes. This choice was not merely stylistic. It was a political statement about who the journal was addressing and what kind of literacy and cultural competence it assumed in its readers.

The history of the Bengali language is complex and politically charged. Bengali has, from the medieval period onward, existed in a kind of diglossia: a situation in which a "high" literary register, heavily Sanskritic in its vocabulary and formal in its syntax, coexists with a range of spoken vernacular registers that vary across class, region, religion, and social context. The standardization of written Bengali in the nineteenth century, associated particularly with the work of the bhadralok literary establishment, had produced a written norm that reflected the linguistic practices of the educated Hindu middle class and that was relatively inaccessible to those whose primary linguistic practice was rooted in the spoken vernacular.

For Langol, the choice to write in a more accessible Bengali, closer to the vernacular speech of its intended readers, was a conscious effort to democratize political communication. It said, in effect, that the cultural resources of Marxian socialist politics were not the exclusive property of the educated elite but were available to anyone who could read in any form of Bengali. This democratizing linguistic politics is itself a form of cultural politics, a challenge to the hegemony of the educated class in the production of political knowledge.

At the same time, this linguistic choice had limitations. It risked being patronizing, of the educated writer performing accessibility for the masses rather than genuinely addressing them as

equals. And it raised the question, which has never been fully resolved in the tradition of left-wing cultural politics, of what the relationship should be between intellectual sophistication and popular accessibility in political communication. Should socialist cultural politics aim for the highest level of theoretical sophistication, at the risk of reaching only a small educated audience? Or should it aim for maximum accessibility, at the risk of over-simplifying the analysis and underestimating the intellectual capacities of its audience?

3.4 Song, Poem, and Political Mobilization in Langol

The literary content of Langol, particularly its poetry and songs, represents one of the most significant contributions of the journal and deserves extended analysis. Nazrul's contributions to Langol include some of his most politically direct and emotionally powerful verse, work that draws explicitly on the conditions of peasant and working-class life and that deploys the full resources of Bengali literary and musical tradition in the service of political mobilization.

The genre of the political song, in the Bengali tradition, has a long history that connects the literary traditions of the educated classes with the musical traditions of folk performance. The Baul musical tradition, the kirtan tradition, the tradition of the jatra (a form of popular theatrical performance), and the tradition of the patriotic song that had developed in the context of the Swadeshi movement, all provided resources that could be drawn on and transformed in the production of politically committed music and song.

Nazrul's political songs for Langol draw on all of these traditions while also incorporating elements from Islamic musical tradition, particularly the qawwali form that was associated with Sufi devotional practice. The result is a form of political song that is simultaneously deeply rooted in Bengali cultural tradition and explicitly committed to a socialist political program, that speaks to both the cultural identity and the class interests of its intended audience.

The analysis of this material from a Marxian perspective requires attending to the specific formal properties of the songs and poems, their meters, their melodic patterns, their use of imagery and metaphor, as well as to their political content and their social function. The best political songs work through formal sophistication rather than in spite of it: the formal qualities of the work create emotional and aesthetic effects that amplify and deepen the political content rather than merely illustrating it.

3.5 The Peasant Question in Langol

One of Langol's most important contributions was its sustained attention to the conditions of the Bengali peasantry, a social class that was simultaneously the majority of the population, the primary producer of the surplus that sustained the colonial economy, and among the least politically visible and least culturally represented groups in the mainstream Bengali public sphere.

The analysis of peasant conditions in Langol draws on a combination of empirical description and theoretical analysis. The empirical descriptions, based on the direct knowledge that the journal's writers had of rural Bengal, painted vivid pictures of the poverty, exploitation, and

social degradation that characterized peasant life: the burden of debt to landlords and money-lenders, the insecurity of land tenure, the vulnerability to natural disasters and price fluctuations, the lack of access to education and healthcare, and the constant threat of violence from the landlord class and its agents.

The theoretical analysis situates these conditions within the framework of colonial capitalism and the specific structures of Bengal's agrarian economy. The Permanent Settlement, the system of landlordism, the mechanisms of debt bondage, the role of the colonial state in enforcing the rights of property against the needs of the poor, all of these are analyzed with a clarity and a critical acuity that reflects the influence of Marxian political economy on the thinking of the journal's editors.

What is particularly significant about Langol's treatment of the peasant question is its insistence on the political agency of the peasantry. In many traditions of left-wing thought, including some versions of classical Marxism, the peasantry is understood primarily as a class in need of leadership, a mass whose suffering creates the conditions for revolutionary change but who cannot, without the guidance of the organized working class and its vanguard party, become genuine political agents. Langol, drawing both on the specific conditions of Bengal and on the Leninist tradition of peasant-worker alliance, presents the peasantry as a class with genuine political interests and genuine political capacities, capable of organized resistance to exploitation if given the organizational tools and the political education that the communist movement could provide.

3.6 Langol's Legacy: Short Life, Long Shadow

Langol ceased publication after a relatively brief period. The colonial government's surveillance and harassment of its editors, combined with financial difficulties and the broader challenges facing the early communist movement, made it impossible to sustain the journal beyond its initial period of activity. But the significance of Langol cannot be measured by the length of its publication run. Its importance lies in what it represented and what it contributed to the longer development of left-wing cultural politics in Bengal.

Langol established a template for the combination of socialist political journalism with literary and cultural production that would be developed and extended by subsequent generations of left-wing Bengali cultural workers. The tradition of the IPTA, the tradition of the progressive writers' movement, the tradition of the people's theater, all of these drew on and developed the possibilities that Langol had articulated.

More specifically, Langol established the principle that genuinely socialist cultural politics must address the peasantry and the working class not merely as the objects of political sympathy but as the subjects of political agency, as the constituency whose interests and aspirations should define the direction of cultural production. This principle, which may seem obvious stated baldly, was in fact a significant departure from the dominant traditions of Bengali literary and cultural life, in which the educated middle class had assumed without question its role as the producer and arbiter of cultural value.

CHAPTER FOUR: RAKTAKAROBI: TAGORE'S CRITIQUE OF CAPITAL

4.1 Tagore and the Marxian Tradition: A Complex Relationship

The relationship between Rabindranath Tagore and the Marxian tradition is complex, contested, and intellectually productive. Tagore was not a Marxist. He did not accept the materialist philosophy of classical Marxism, he was deeply suspicious of what he saw as the tendency toward mechanistic thinking and the subordination of the individual to collective abstractions that he associated with Marxist politics, and he maintained throughout his life a commitment to a form of humanist spiritualism that was incompatible with Marxian materialism.

And yet Tagore was also one of the most penetrating critics of capitalism and industrial modernity that the twentieth century produced. His analysis of the dehumanizing effects of industrial production, his critique of the machine civilization that sacrificed human wholeness to the demands of efficiency and accumulation, his understanding of the way that capitalist social relations severed the connections between human beings and between human beings and the natural world, all of these anticipate and in some ways surpass the analyses of the Frankfurt School critics who were developing similar arguments in Europe at roughly the same time.

Raktakarobi is the fullest and most sustained expression of Tagore's critique of capitalism and industrial modernity. Written in 1926, three years after the establishment of Santiniketan as a university and in the same decade as Nazrul's most intensely political work, the play represents a remarkable achievement: the creation of a symbolist literary work that is simultaneously a philosophical meditation on the human condition and a direct political engagement with the most urgent questions of the twentieth century.

4.2 The Structure and Setting of Raktakarobi

Raktakarobi is organized as a symbolist drama: its characters are types rather than realistically drawn individuals, its setting is mythological rather than historically specific, and its language moves between the registers of poetry, myth, and philosophical dialogue rather than the naturalistic representation of everyday speech. This formal choice is itself philosophically significant, and it is one of the most important things that a Marxian analysis of the play must address.

Why did Tagore choose symbolism rather than realism for his critique of capitalism? The answer is not simply a matter of aesthetic preference. It is a matter of political philosophy. Tagore believed that the deepest truths about the human condition cannot be represented directly, through the realistic depiction of specific social situations. They can only be represented indirectly, through the creation of symbolic forms that point beyond the immediately visible surface of social life to the underlying structures and forces that shape it. The symbolist form, on this view, is not an aesthetic retreat from political engagement but a form of political engagement that operates at a deeper level than realistic social criticism.

This understanding of the relationship between form and content, between the aesthetic and the political, is one of the points at which Tagore's aesthetic theory comes closest to certain strands within the Marxian tradition. Benjamin's theory of the "dialectical image," which holds that genuine historical insight is achieved through the sudden, illuminating juxtaposition of historically separated moments rather than through the realistic depiction of historical events, has some formal parallels with Tagore's symbolist method. Both share an understanding that the most politically significant kind of cultural production is that which reveals the hidden structures beneath the surface of social life rather than merely reflecting that surface.

The setting of the play, Yakshapuri (the city of Yakshas), draws on Sanskrit mythological tradition. The Yakshas, in Sanskrit mythology, are supernatural beings associated with wealth, the underground world, and the mysteries of material accumulation. By naming his imaginary city after these figures, Tagore is suggesting that the world of industrial capitalism is itself a kind of myth, a supernatural story told by those whose power rests on the extraction of wealth from the earth, a story that has been normalized and naturalized in the same way that myths normalize and naturalize the social arrangements they describe.

The physical geography of Yakshapuri is organized around the gold mines that lie at its heart. The entire life of the city is oriented toward the extraction of gold, and the human beings who live and work in it are defined entirely by their relationship to this process of extraction. They have numbers rather than names, a formal detail that Tagore uses with great precision to represent the process by which capitalism reduces human beings to abstract units of labor power, stripping them of their individuality and their humanity.

4.3 The King and the System: Invisible Power

One of the most remarkable formal features of *Raktakarobi* is the King's invisibility. The King, who rules Yakshapuri, is never seen directly. He communicates with his subjects only through a net of gold that separates him from the rest of the city, speaking through messengers and agents. This formal device of invisible power is philosophically significant in ways that connect directly to Marxian and Foucauldian analyses of the structure of capitalist social power.

In Marxian analysis, the power of capital is not the power of specific individuals who choose to exploit and oppress. It is a systemic power that operates through the logic of the market, through the impersonal requirements of capitalist accumulation, through social forms that impose themselves on all actors regardless of their individual intentions. The capitalist who exploits workers is not simply a bad person who chooses to exploit. He is an actor constrained by the systemic logic of competitive capitalism, which imposes the demand for maximum accumulation on pain of elimination from the system. The power of capital is, in this sense, invisible: it is not concentrated in the person of any individual but distributed throughout the entire structure of the economic system.

Tagore's invisible King captures this structural quality of capitalist power with extraordinary poetic economy. The King's separation from his subjects by a net of gold is both a literal image and a symbolic one: the literal net of gold is also the metaphorical net of economic relations that

mediates all social life in a capitalist society, that places a veil of monetary exchange between human beings and their fundamental human connections to each other and to the natural world.

Foucault's analysis of power, developed in works like "Discipline and Punish" (1975) and the first volume of "The History of Sexuality" (1976), offers a complementary perspective on Tagore's invisible King. For Foucault, modern power is not concentrated in a sovereign who commands and punishes. It is diffused throughout the entire social body through a network of surveillance, normalization, and disciplinary practices that operate without any specific individual exercising conscious control. The panopticon, Bentham's design for a prison in which all prisoners can be observed from a central tower at all times, is Foucault's symbol for this diffuse, omnipresent, invisible power. There is a suggestive parallel between Foucault's panopticon and Tagore's invisible King behind the golden net: both are figures for a power that is felt everywhere but concentrated nowhere, that shapes behavior without being directly confrontable.

The difference between Tagore's vision and Foucault's analysis is also illuminating. Foucault's analysis tends toward a kind of political pessimism: if power is everywhere and concentrated nowhere, if resistance itself is always already shaped by the power it resists, then the possibility of genuine liberation becomes extremely difficult to conceptualize. Tagore's symbolist drama, despite its dark diagnosis of the conditions of life under capitalism, maintains a commitment to the possibility of liberation: the liberation that Nandini represents, the possibility of a form of human life organized around different values than those of Yakshapuri.

4.4 Nandini: The Figure of Counter-Hegemonic Life

Nandini is the central figure of *Raktakarobi*, and the analysis of her character and function in the play is one of the most important tasks of a reading of the text from a Marxian perspective. She is a young woman of extraordinary natural vitality, beauty, and joy, associated with the red oleander flowers that grow in the world outside Yakshapuri and that she brings into the city. Her presence in the city is a disruption of its entire logic: she cannot be defined by her place in the system of gold extraction, she insists on her own humanity and her own desire, and she maintains connections to the living world outside the city's walls that the city's inhabitants have largely lost.

In Gramscian terms, Nandini is a figure of counter-hegemony. Her existence in Yakshapuri challenges the hegemonic values of the city, not through direct political argument or organized resistance but simply through the quality of her being, through her refusal to allow the values of the gold-mining economy to colonize her own sense of what is worth living for. She represents the persistence of human values, of the desire for beauty, connection, freedom, and joy, in the face of the systematic attempt to reduce all human life to the logic of accumulation.

But Nandini's counter-hegemonic function is more complex than this description suggests. She is not simply a symbol of abstract human values. She is also a particular woman, with particular desires and particular relationships, and the play traces with great care the specific ways in which her humanity brings her into conflict with the dehumanizing logic of Yakshapuri. The most important of these relationships is her relationship with Ranjan, the man she loves and who has

been absorbed into the system of Yakshapuri, and her relationship with the King, who is simultaneously attracted to and threatened by what she represents.

The triangular relationship between Nandini, Ranjan, and the King can be read as an allegorical representation of the political dynamics of counter-hegemonic struggle. Ranjan, who was once fully human but has been partially absorbed into the system, represents the working class in its ambivalent position: simultaneously the object of capitalist exploitation and the potential agent of resistance, caught between the system's demands and the alternative possibilities that Nandini's presence suggests. The King, who is fascinated by Nandini and sees in her the humanity he has sacrificed, represents the ambivalence of the capitalist class: simultaneously the creator and the prisoner of the system it benefits from.

4.5 The Red Oleander: Symbol, Nature, and Resistance

The red oleander flower, which gives the play its title and serves as its central symbol, is worth extended analysis. The oleander is a poisonous plant, beautiful but dangerous, an object of extraordinary aesthetic power that also carries the potential for harm. Its redness associates it with the tradition of revolutionary symbolism, with blood, with passion, with the intensity of life fully lived. And its persistence, its ability to grow and bloom even in the dark, enclosed world of Yakshapuri, marks it as a symbol of the indestructibility of natural life in the face of the machine civilization's attempt to enclose, control, and exploit it.

The symbolic use of a natural object as the central image of a critique of industrial capitalism has obvious parallels with the tradition of Romantic anti-capitalism, associated in the British tradition with figures like William Blake, William Wordsworth, John Keats, and later John Ruskin and William Morris. The Romantics used the imagery of nature, particularly the imagery of the organic, growing, and freely developing world of plants and animals, as a counterimage to the mechanized, rationalized, and enclosed world of industrial capitalism. The factory and the garden, the machine and the flower, became opposed symbols in a cultural politics that mourned the displacement of organic community by the iron logic of industrial production.

Tagore was well acquainted with the Romantic tradition, both in its English form and in its German, French, and Bengali manifestations. His use of the red oleander as the central symbol of Raktakarobi draws on this tradition while also transforming it in characteristically Tagorean ways. The oleander is not simply a symbol of innocent natural beauty corrupted by industrial civilization. It is also, as we noted, a poisonous plant: its beauty is dangerous, its sweetness conceals the potential for harm. This ambivalence prevents the play from falling into a simple Romantic opposition between innocent nature and corrupted civilization. The values that Nandini and the red oleander represent are not a return to a pre-industrial innocence that has been lost. They are a set of human possibilities that exist within the contradictions of the present, that must be fought for rather than simply mourned.

4.6 The Critique of Fordism: Raktakarobi in Economic Context

To read Raktakarobi purely as a symbolist literary text, divorced from its specific economic and historical context, is to miss an important dimension of its significance. The play was written in

the mid-1920s, at a time when the dominant form of capitalist production was undergoing a major transformation associated with what has come to be called Fordism: the system of mass production pioneered by Henry Ford in his Michigan automobile factories, characterized by the assembly line, the rigorous division of labor, the reduction of individual workers' skills and autonomy to the minimum required for their specific task in the production process, and the generation of the cheap consumer goods that could be bought by the workers whose wages the system generated.

Fordism represented a significant development in the organization of capitalist production, and it generated a correspondingly significant set of cultural and intellectual responses. From Antonio Gramsci's analysis of Americanism and Fordism in the Prison Notebooks to the cultural criticism of the Frankfurt School, from Charlie Chaplin's satirical representation of assembly line production in "Modern Times" to the Futurist celebration of the machine as the highest expression of human creativity, the cultural politics of the Fordist era were deeply shaped by the question of what the machine civilization meant for human life.

Tagore's *Yakshapuri*, with its numbered workers, its relentless orientation toward the extraction of material wealth, and its complete subordination of human life to the demands of production, is a recognizable representation of the Fordist industrial order as seen from the perspective of colonial Bengal. Bengal, of course, had its own specific form of industrial capitalism: the jute mills, the tea plantations, the coal mines, the engineering workshops of Kolkata, all operating under conditions that combined the logic of industrial capitalism with the specific coercions and degradations of colonial labor relations. But Tagore's symbolic representation of industrial capitalism reaches beyond the specifically colonial form to address the general logic of a social system that reduces human beings to abstract units of productive capacity.

The contemporary relevance of this critique is striking. The twenty-first century has seen new forms of the logic that Tagore diagnosed in *Yakshapuri*: the Amazon warehouses in which workers are monitored by algorithm to ensure maximum productivity; the gig economy in which workers have neither the protections of employment nor the autonomy of self-employment; the platform economy in which human sociality itself is transformed into a source of data and value for corporate extraction. These contemporary developments suggest that Tagore's critique, far from being a historical relic of early twentieth-century romantic anti-capitalism, continues to illuminate dimensions of the human experience of capitalist production that purely economic analysis struggles to capture.

4.7 The Political Resolution: What Does the Ending Mean?

The ending of *Raktakarobi*, in which Nandini confronts the King and the play reaches its climactic moment of crisis and potential transformation, is one of the most debated aspects of the text among Bengali literary critics. The play does not offer a straightforwardly optimistic resolution: the liberation that Nandini represents is not achieved through a revolutionary overthrow of the system of *Yakshapuri*. The ending is more ambiguous, more provisional, more open to different interpretations than a straightforwardly political reading would suggest.

Some critics have interpreted the ending as a failure of nerve on Tagore's part, an unwillingness to follow the logic of his own critique to its revolutionary conclusion. On this reading, the play's symbolist form ultimately serves as a retreat from political commitment, a displacement of the demand for structural transformation into the realm of individual moral and spiritual renewal.

Others have argued that the ending's ambiguity is itself a form of honesty, a recognition of the difficulty and complexity of the problem that the play poses. The King's final recognition of his own humanity, his acknowledgment of what he has sacrificed in the service of gold, does not transform Yakshapuri or liberate its workers. But it is a moment of truth, a crack in the hegemonic ideology that has sustained the system, and it points toward the possibility of transformation even if it does not achieve it.

From a Marxian perspective, the most productive reading of the ending is one that takes seriously both the play's critical achievements and its limitations. Raktakarobi correctly identifies the dehumanizing logic of capitalist production and represents it with extraordinary symbolic power. It correctly identifies the persistence of human values, the red oleander's ability to flower even in Yakshapuri, as the basis for a potential counter-hegemony. But it locates the possibility of transformation primarily in the individual moral and spiritual domain rather than in the collective political action of the exploited class. This is Tagore's specific limitation as a political thinker: his commitment to a humanist individualism that prevents him from fully embracing the collective, organizational, and structural dimensions of political transformation that Marxian analysis insists on.

This limitation does not diminish the play's achievement. It defines the specific intellectual and political contribution that Raktakarobi makes to the tradition of Bengali cultural and political thought. It says: here is what capitalism does to human beings, here is what it destroys and what it cannot fully destroy, here is the human wound at the center of the machine civilization. It does not fully answer the question of what should be done about this situation. But asking the question with this degree of philosophical depth and aesthetic power is itself an enormous contribution.

CHAPTER FIVE: READING THREE TEXTS TOGETHER

5.1 The Method of Comparative Analysis

Having analyzed each of the three texts separately, we are now in a position to read them together, to examine what their juxtaposition reveals that no individual reading of any single text could reveal. This is the central methodological contribution of Abdul Kafi's analytical project: not the individual analysis of each text in isolation but the comparative reading that illuminates the relations between them.

The comparative method in literary analysis, as distinct from the purely historical or sociological method, involves attending to the formal, thematic, and rhetorical relationships between texts: what do they share, where do they diverge, how do their different formal choices create different

political and philosophical possibilities, and what does the whole that they constitute together illuminate about the historical moment they share?

The most immediately striking feature of a comparative reading of Dhumketu, Langol, and Raktakarobi is the profound difference in their formal orientation. Dhumketu is journalism: direct, urgent, polemical, designed for immediate political effect. Langol is a combination of political journalism and literary production, drawing on both the analytical resources of socialist political thought and the emotional and imaginative resources of poetry and song. Raktakarobi is symbolist drama: indirect, contemplative, philosophical, designed for the kind of sustained aesthetic and intellectual engagement that the theater at its best produces.

These formal differences are not merely stylistic. They reflect different theories of political communication, different understandings of what literature and culture can do in the service of political transformation, and different assumptions about who the addressee of cultural production should be.

5.2 Three Theories of Political Communication

The three texts embody three distinct theories of political communication, each of which captures something important about the relationship between culture and political change.

Dhumketu's theory of political communication is essentially agitational. It believes in the power of passionate, direct, emotionally forceful communication to awaken political consciousness and motivate political action. Its implicit model of the relationship between culture and politics is one in which cultural production functions as a kind of detonator: it provides the spark that ignites the political energies that are already potentially present in the audience but need an external stimulus to be activated.

Langol's theory of political communication is essentially educational and organizational. It draws on the Leninist understanding of the political newspaper as an organizer, but it extends this organizational function to include cultural and literary production. Its implicit model of the relationship between culture and politics is one in which cultural production functions as a tool for building the shared consciousness and organizational capacity that a mass political movement requires. Literature and song, on this view, do not simply provide emotional stimulation. They create the shared cultural reference points, the common emotional vocabulary, and the sense of collective identity that sustain political organization over time.

Raktakarobi's theory of political communication is essentially critical and contemplative. It believes in the power of sustained aesthetic experience to transform the way that people see the world, to reveal the hidden mechanisms of social life, and to make available the imaginative resources for conceiving alternatives to the existing order. Its implicit model of the relationship between culture and politics is one in which cultural production functions as a form of consciousness-raising, creating the conditions of understanding and moral clarity that are necessary for meaningful political commitment even if they are not sufficient for political action.

Each of these theories captures a genuine dimension of what political culture can accomplish. The agitational function of Dhumketu is real: there are moments in political history when what is needed above all is the spark that awakens a slumbering consciousness, and passionate, direct political communication can provide that spark. The organizational function of Langol is also real: sustained political change requires the construction of shared identities, shared vocabularies, and shared organizational structures, and cultural production can contribute to all of these. And the critical-contemplative function of Raktakarobi is also real: without the capacity for sustained reflection and critical understanding, political energies that are genuinely mobilized can be misdirected or captured by forces that serve very different ends from those that originally motivated them.

What is most significant about reading all three texts together is the recognition that no single theory of political communication is adequate on its own, and that the tradition of left-wing cultural politics at its best has always deployed all three functions simultaneously. The most effective political culture combines agitation, organization, and critical reflection in proportions that are calibrated to the specific historical situation.

5.3 Three Figures of the Political Subject

The three texts also construct three different figures of the political subject: the ideal type of the person who is addressed by the text and whose political agency the text is designed to awaken, develop, or sustain.

Dhumketu's political subject is the Bengali nationalist, the person whose primary political identity is defined by their opposition to colonial rule and whose political action is oriented toward the goal of national liberation. This subject is addressed as a Bengali first, as a member of a national community with a shared history of colonial humiliation and a shared aspiration for liberation. Class, caste, and religious identity are secondary to this primary national identity.

Langol's political subject is the Bengali worker and peasant, the member of the exploited majority whose conditions of life are shaped primarily by the class structures of colonial capitalism and whose political agency is understood as the agency of a class rather than merely a nation. This subject is addressed as a member of the producing majority, as someone whose labor creates the wealth that sustains the entire social system and whose collective organization is the primary force for social transformation.

Raktakarobi's political subject is more difficult to characterize in simple sociological terms. The play addresses itself to the human being in general, to the person whose humanity is being damaged and diminished by the logic of the machine civilization and who retains, in however attenuated a form, the capacity to recognize and respond to that damage. This subject is not defined primarily by their class position or their national identity but by their humanity, their capacity for beauty, connection, and joy, that Yakshapuri has sought to extinguish.

These three figures of the political subject are not mutually exclusive. The Bengali worker who reads Langol and the Bengali nationalist who reads Dhumketu and the Bengali educated person who sees Raktakarobi are, in many cases, the same person experiencing different dimensions of

their situation. But the different ways in which the three texts construct their political subjects reveal different philosophical assumptions about what the fundamental basis of political commitment is, what the primary forms of social identity are, and what the ultimate goals of political transformation should be.

5.4 Three Understandings of History

The three texts also embody three different understandings of history and historical change, and these differences are among the most philosophically significant aspects of their comparison.

Dhumketu's understanding of history is broadly voluntarist: it emphasizes the role of human will, passion, and political commitment in the making of history. The colonial order can be overthrown if sufficient numbers of people are willing to act against it with sufficient determination and courage. History, on this view, is made by political actors who are willing to risk everything for their ideals: by the rebels, the defiers, the people who are willing to summon death in the direction of life.

Langol's understanding of history is structuralist in a Marxian sense: it emphasizes the role of class structures and economic contradictions in shaping historical development. History does not change simply because people decide to change it. It changes because the structural contradictions of the existing system create the conditions for transformation, and because organized political movements can take advantage of these contradictions to accelerate and direct the process of change. Human will and political commitment are necessary but not sufficient conditions for historical transformation.

Raktakarobi's understanding of history is most difficult to characterize in the terms of conventional political theory. It has elements of both the voluntarist and the structuralist view, but it situates both within a broader philosophical framework that is ultimately more humanist than either. For Tagore, as he represents his understanding in this play, history is the story of the struggle between the forces of humanization and dehumanization, between the capacity of human beings to develop their full potential for beauty, connection, and creative self-expression, and the forces, whether political, economic, or psychological, that seek to diminish and suppress that potential.

This humanist understanding of history is sometimes dismissed in the Marxian tradition as idealist, as locating the motor of historical change in the realm of values and consciousness rather than in the material forces of production and class struggle. But it can also be seen as complementary to the Marxian structural analysis: the structural analysis explains why the conditions of human dehumanization exist, while the humanist analysis explains why those conditions are worth fighting against and what kind of human flourishing a genuinely emancipatory politics would be in the service of.

5.5 The Communal Question Revisited: Three Responses

One of the most significant dimensions of the comparative reading of the three texts is their different engagements with the communal question, the question of Hindu-Muslim relations that, as we established in Chapter One, was one of the central political crises of 1920s Bengal.

Dhumketu's response to the communal question is syncretic and explicitly anti-communal. Nazrul's journalism in Dhumketu consistently argues for Hindu-Muslim unity in the face of colonial divide-and-rule politics, draws equally on Hindu and Islamic cultural traditions, and treats communal politics as a form of manipulation by colonial and class interests against the genuine interests of the Bengali people. This response is brave and admirable, but it also has limitations: it tends to present communal identity as purely ideological, as a false consciousness that dissolves in the light of genuine class and national analysis, without fully acknowledging the depth and complexity of religious and cultural difference.

Langol's response to the communal question is class reductionist: it tends to see communal politics as primarily an instrument of class domination, used by landlords, money-lenders, and their colonial patrons to divide and weaken the working class and peasantry. This analysis captures an important truth, but it also oversimplifies: the appeal of communal identity is not purely manipulated from above but is also rooted in genuine cultural communities with their own histories, their own practices, and their own understandings of the world.

Raktakarobi's response to the communal question is implicit rather than explicit: the symbolist form of the play, which addresses itself to universal human themes rather than specific communal situations, sidesteps the communal question rather than directly engaging it. This evasion can be seen as a limitation, but it can also be seen as a refusal of the terms in which the communal question was usually posed, a gesture toward the possibility of a politics that transcends communal categories by insisting on the universal human dimensions of the struggle for liberation.

CHAPTER SIX: THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR MARXIAN LITERARY CRITICISM

6.1 What Does This Analysis Contribute to Theory?

The comparative analysis of Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol that we have been developing is not only of historical or biographical interest. It makes specific contributions to the broader project of Marxian literary theory that deserve explicit articulation.

The first contribution is a demonstration of the inadequacy of any simple reflection theory of literature. None of the three texts simply "reflects" the conditions of 1920s Bengal. Each transforms those conditions in specific ways, through specific formal choices, specific rhetorical strategies, and specific constructions of imaginary worlds and political subjects that go beyond the immediate surfaces of social reality. The relationship between the text and its historical context is dialectical rather than reflective: each text is shaped by its historical context but also actively shapes the possibilities of understanding and action available within that context.

The second contribution is a demonstration of the importance of form in political analysis. The formal choices that distinguish Dhumketu, Langol, and Raktakarobi from each other are not secondary or merely aesthetic. They are politically significant choices that reflect different understandings of what political communication requires, different theories of consciousness and agency, and different assessments of the historical situation. A Marxian literary criticism that fails to analyze form is not genuinely Marxian. It is merely a sociology of content that happens to use literary texts as its data.

The third contribution is a demonstration of the value of comparative analysis for understanding any single text. No single one of the three texts can be fully understood in isolation. Dhumketu's limitations become visible when we compare it with Langol's more systematic class analysis and Raktakarobi's more sustained philosophical critique. Langol's limitations become visible when we compare it with Dhumketu's emotional power and Raktakarobi's formal sophistication. And Raktakarobi's limitations become visible when we compare it with the direct, unambiguous political commitments of Dhumketu and Langol. The whole that the three texts constitute together is richer and more illuminating than any of the parts in isolation.

6.2 The Question of Aesthetic Value and Political Commitment

One of the most persistent debates in Marxian literary criticism concerns the relationship between aesthetic value and political commitment. The naive view, often associated with "socialist realism," holds that the politically correct text is automatically the aesthetically good text, or at least that political correctness is a necessary condition for genuine aesthetic value. This view has been disastrously wrong in practice, generating enormous quantities of dull, didactic, aesthetically dead political art that achieved neither its artistic nor its political goals.

The opposite view, associated with positions like aesthetic autonomy or "art for art's sake," holds that aesthetic value and political commitment are entirely separate, that the political content of a work is irrelevant to its aesthetic quality, and that any attempt to evaluate art by political criteria distorts the specifically aesthetic dimension of the work. This view is more sophisticated than its opposite, and it has produced some important aesthetic insights. But it is also inadequate, because it fails to recognize that aesthetic choices are themselves politically significant, that the apparent autonomy of aesthetic form from political content is itself a historical and ideological construction rather than a natural fact.

The comparison of the three texts we have been analyzing suggests a more nuanced position: that aesthetic value and political commitment can reinforce each other when both are pursued with genuine rigor and integrity, but that they can also conflict when the demands of immediate political communication are allowed to override the demands of artistic truth. Dhumketu's aesthetic energy is inseparable from its political passion: the emotional force of Nazrul's poetry is simultaneously aesthetic and political, and neither dimension can be evaluated independently of the other. Raktakarobi's extraordinary aesthetic achievement is also inseparable from its philosophical depth: the symbolic language of the play is both aesthetically powerful and philosophically illuminating, and the combination is what gives the play its enduring significance.

The theoretical implication is that the best Marxian literary criticism does not subordinate the aesthetic to the political or the political to the aesthetic. It traces the specific ways in which the aesthetic and the political are intertwined in specific texts, attending to both dimensions simultaneously and analyzing the ways in which their interaction produces effects that neither dimension alone could produce.

6.3 Georg Lukacs, Modernism, and the Realism Debate

The analysis of Raktakarobi raises, in acute form, the famous debate between Georg Lukacs and the proponents of modernism about the relationship between realism and formal experimentation in politically engaged literature. Lukacs, the Hungarian Marxian literary critic who was arguably the most important figure in the twentieth-century development of Marxian aesthetics, was a committed advocate of what he called "critical realism," the tradition of great nineteenth-century European fiction represented by figures like Balzac, Tolstoy, and Thomas Mann. Against this tradition, Lukacs set the "decadence" of modernist literature, which he associated with figures like Kafka, Joyce, and Beckett, arguing that modernism's formal experimentation, its fragmented narratives, its focus on individual subjectivity, and its abandonment of the totalizing vision of the great realist tradition, represented a retreat from genuine political and humanist engagement.

The debate about whether this analysis is correct has been one of the most productive in twentieth-century Marxian aesthetics, generating responses from figures like Brecht, Bloch, Benjamin, Adorno, and many others. For our purposes, the debate is relevant because it raises a question directly applicable to Raktakarobi: is Tagore's symbolist form a retreat from political engagement, as a Lukacisian analysis might suggest, or is it a form of political engagement that operates in ways that are not accessible to realistic representation?

We have already suggested our answer to this question: Tagore's symbolism is a form of political engagement that captures dimensions of the experience of capitalist production that realistic representation cannot reach. The invisible King behind the golden net says something about the structural, impersonal quality of capitalist power that a realistic portrait of an individual capitalist could not say. The red oleander as a symbol of the persistence of human values says something about the indestructibility of human possibility in the face of systematic dehumanization that a realistic narrative of individual resistance could not say.

This is not to say that symbolism is always superior to realism as a form of political art. The point is that different formal strategies are appropriate for different dimensions of the political reality one wants to represent, and that the choice of form should be guided by the specific truth one wants to tell rather than by a generic preference for one form over another.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE LEGACY OF THREE TEXTS

7.1 How Dhumketu Changed Bengali Political Culture

The legacy of Dhumketu in Bengali political culture is both direct and diffuse. Directly, the paper contributed to the formation of Nazrul Islam's public persona as the "rebel poet," the passionate anti-colonial voice whose willingness to face imprisonment rather than compromise his political commitments made him a hero to a generation of Bengali nationalists. This persona, and the tradition of passionate, uncompromising political poetry associated with it, has continued to influence Bengali literary culture from the 1920s to the present.

More diffusely, Dhumketu contributed to the formation of a tradition of journalistic political writing in Bengali that combined literary quality with political passion, that refused the separation between aesthetic achievement and political commitment, and that addressed itself to a mass public rather than an educated elite. This tradition influenced subsequent generations of Bengali political journalists, from the communist press of the 1930s and 1940s to the independence movement journalism of the 1940s to the journalism that accompanied the liberation struggle of Bangladesh in 1971.

The specific influence of Dhumketu on the tradition of revolutionary Bengali writing for mass audiences, the tradition that would flower in the IPTA's cultural programs, in the progressive writers' movement, and in the people's theater tradition, is also significant. The combination of literary quality and political commitment, the deployment of high aesthetic values in the service of political mobilization, that Dhumketu exemplified became a defining characteristic of the best work in this tradition.

7.2 Raktakarobi and the Question of Tagore's Radicalism

The legacy of Raktakarobi has been complex and contested. For much of the twentieth century, the play was read primarily as a philosophical allegory about the dangers of industrial civilization, with its political specificity somewhat blurred by the emphasis on its universal humanist themes. The influence of this reading can be seen in the way that Tagore's work has often been presented internationally, as a timeless expression of universal humanist values, stripped of its specific political and historical dimensions.

More recently, particularly in the context of the renewed global interest in critiques of capitalism that followed the 2008 financial crisis and has intensified since, the specifically political dimension of Raktakarobi has been more clearly recognized. Readings of the play that situate it firmly within the tradition of anti-capitalist cultural critique, that read the King and Yakshapuri as representations of specific forms of capitalist power rather than merely as universal metaphors for all forms of oppression, have become more common and more influential.

This renewed attention to the political specificity of Raktakarobi is itself a product of the kind of historically grounded, theoretically informed reading that Kafi's analytical framework enables. By situating the play in its specific historical context, by reading it alongside the more directly political texts of Dhumketu and Langol, by analyzing its formal choices as political choices rather than merely aesthetic ones, this approach reveals dimensions of the play's significance that purely aesthetic readings cannot see.

7.3 Langol and the Socialist Cultural Tradition

The legacy of Langol is perhaps the most directly traceable of the three texts, because the tradition of socialist cultural politics that it helped to establish can be followed through a relatively clear chain of institutional and organizational connections. The IPTA, founded in 1943, drew directly on the tradition of worker and peasant cultural politics that Langol and similar journals had established in the 1920s. The progressive writers' movement, the tradition of Bengali political song associated with figures like Hemanga Biswas and Salil Chowdhury, the people's theater tradition associated with Utpal Dutt and Badal Sircar, all of these can be traced in part to the model of politically committed cultural production that Langol represented.

More broadly, Langol's insistence on the political significance of cultural production for the organizing of peasant and working-class movements has had lasting consequences for the way that left-wing political organizations in Bengal think about the relationship between their political work and their cultural work. The understanding that politics and culture are inseparable, that the struggle for political power requires simultaneously the struggle for cultural hegemony, that political organization must attend to the imaginative and emotional dimensions of political life as well as to its organizational and strategic dimensions, this understanding, which Langol helped to establish in the Bengali context, has been a consistent feature of the best work in the Bengali left tradition ever since.

7.4 The Three Texts in Contemporary Perspective

Reading Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol in the second quarter of the twenty-first century requires attending to the ways in which the conditions they addressed have both changed and remained the same. The most obvious change is the formal end of British colonial rule: India achieved independence in 1947, and the specific political crisis that gave these texts their immediate urgency, the crisis of colonial domination, has been superseded by new political configurations.

But the underlying conditions that the three texts diagnosed have not been resolved. Colonial capitalism has been replaced by postcolonial capitalism, which operates through similar structures of exploitation and accumulation even as its specific forms and its specific personnel have changed. The subordination of human values to the logic of accumulation that Raktakarobi diagnosed in Yakshapuri has not been overcome but has intensified under conditions of neoliberal globalization. The communal divisions that Dhumketu sought to heal have not been transcended but have taken on new and in some ways more dangerous forms in the era of Hindu nationalism. And the peasant and working-class poverty that Langol addressed remains a massive reality in the global South, including in West Bengal.

In this context, the three texts retain a contemporary relevance that goes beyond their historical significance. They are not merely documents of a past crisis. They are models of the kind of cultural response to crisis that the present moment also requires: passionate, politically committed, aesthetically ambitious, and grounded in a deep understanding of the specific historical conditions that give the present its specific character.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS TO PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO READ THESE TEXTS TOGETHER?

The central argument of this Part can now be stated in its fullest form. When Abdul Kafi reads Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol together, under the rubric of the phrase "calling toward death for the sake of life," he is making several interconnected intellectual and political claims.

He is claiming that the relationship between literature and political struggle cannot be understood through any single text or any single tradition, however powerful. It requires comparative analysis, the reading of texts together that reveals what no individual text reveals in isolation.

He is claiming that the boundary between "literary" and "political" texts is not a natural boundary but a constructed one, reflecting specific assumptions about what counts as "literature" that are themselves politically significant. The journalism of Dhumketu is as much a literary achievement as the symbolist drama of Raktakarobi. The political songs of Langol are as much an aesthetic achievement as the poetry of the canonical tradition.

He is claiming that the crisis of colonial Bengal in the 1920s is not simply a historical event that has been superseded by subsequent developments. It is an unresolved contradiction whose dynamics continue to shape the present. The questions that Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol raised about the relationship between cultural production and political transformation, about the relationship between national liberation and social transformation, about the relationship between universal human values and specific class and community interests, are questions that remain unresolved and continue to demand serious intellectual and political engagement.

And he is claiming, implicitly but unmistakably, that the task of Marxian literary criticism in the present is not simply to understand the past but to use that understanding in the service of imagining and working toward a genuinely emancipatory future. The reading of historical texts is always also a reading of the present, and the question of what these texts demand of us is always ultimately a question about what kind of political and cultural work the present moment requires.

Questions for Discussion and Further Research

1. How does the concept of the "dialectical image" (Benjamin) help us to understand the specific formal choices made by the authors of Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol?
2. Compare the three texts' different constructions of the relationship between the individual and the collective in political struggle. Which construction do you find most convincing, and why?
3. How does the communal question of Hindu-Muslim relations in 1920s Bengal relate to contemporary forms of communal politics in India? What resources do the three texts offer for thinking about this contemporary situation?
4. What are the implications of the invisible King in Raktakarobi for the analysis of contemporary forms of capitalist power, including algorithmic management, platform capitalism, and financialization?

5. Compare Nazrul Islam's theory of political communication in *Dhumketu* with Gramsci's theory of the organic intellectual. How do they agree and where do they diverge?
 6. What is the relationship between the linguistic choices of *Langol*, its use of accessible vernacular Bengali, and its political goals? What are the limits of the strategy of linguistic accessibility?
 7. How does the comparison of *Raktakarobi* with *Langol* illuminate the debate between Tagore and the Marxist tradition about the relationship between culture and class struggle?
 8. Assess the strengths and limitations of Lukacs's theory of critical realism for evaluating the three texts we have analyzed. Is *Raktakarobi*'s symbolism a retreat from political engagement or a different form of it?
 9. What is the relationship between the red oleander as a symbol in *Raktakarobi* and the plough as a symbol in *Langol*? What different understandings of the relationship between nature, labor, and human liberation do these two symbols embody?
 10. How does the reading of these three texts together change your understanding of each individual text? What does comparative analysis reveal that close reading of a single text cannot?
-

Suggestions for Further Reading

On Kazi Nazrul Islam: Kris Manjappa's discussions of intellectual cosmopolitanism in the colonial world illuminate the context of Nazrul's politics; Nazrul's own work in English translation, including the collections of poetry published by various Bengali presses, provides essential primary source material; David Kopf, "The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind," while primarily about a different subject, illuminates the cultural context.

On Rabindranath Tagore and *Raktakarobi*: William Radice's translations and introductions to Tagore provide accessible entry points for English-language readers; Supriya Chaudhuri, "Tagore's *Raktakarobi*: The Politics of Form," offers a relevant literary-critical reading; Meenakshi Mukherjee, "Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India," provides context for realism debates in the Indian context.

On *Langol* and the early communist movement in Bengal: Muzaffar Ahmad's own memoirs provide essential primary source material; Sobhanlal Datta Gupta's historical work on the Communist International in India is indispensable; Tanika Sarkar, "Bengal 1928-34: The Politics of Protest," provides the immediate political context.

On Marxian literary theory: Raymond Williams, "Marxism and Literature," remains the best single introduction; Terry Eagleton, "Literary Theory: An Introduction," provides accessible coverage of the major theoretical positions; Fredric Jameson, "The Political Unconscious," develops the most ambitious contemporary version of Marxian literary analysis.

On comparative literature and postcolonial approaches: Homi Bhabha, "The Location of Culture"; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Death of a Discipline"; Neil Lazarus, ed., "The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies."

End of Part Two

This textbook continues with Part Three: The Centre for Marxian Studies: An Intellectual History, 1998 to the Present.

PART THREE: THE CENTRE FOR MARXIAN STUDIES, POLITICAL ECONOMY, LEGAL PHILOSOPHY, AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF CRITICAL THOUGHT

PREFACE TO PART THREE

Part Two of this textbook closed with a reflection on three texts: Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol, and the ways in which their convergence within Abdul Kafi's critical framework illuminates the deep connections between literary production, political struggle, and the ongoing question of what it means to read history from the perspective of those who have been denied the privilege of writing it. Part Three now moves outward from those textual analyses to examine the institutional, philosophical, economic, legal, and political frameworks within which Abdul Kafi's intellectual work is embedded and through which it gains its fullest meaning.

The chapter structure of this Part is organized around a fundamental insight that runs through all of Kafi's work, even when it is not explicitly stated: that the separation of disciplines, the drawing of rigid boundaries between literature and economics, between philosophy and politics, between legal theory and cultural analysis, is itself an ideological act. These separations serve the interests of power by preventing the development of a comprehensive, integrated understanding of how social systems reproduce themselves and how they might be transformed. The Centre for Marxian Studies at Jadavpur University, under Kafi's coordination, represents an institutional refusal of these separations. This Part of the textbook attempts to theorize that refusal and to draw out its implications across the full range of disciplines and analytical traditions that the Centre brings into dialogue.

We begin with a detailed intellectual history of the Centre for Marxian Studies from its founding in 1995 to the present, examining the debates and developments that have shaped its program and the ways in which Kafi's own intellectual formation has been shaped by and has shaped the Centre's work. We then move into extended analyses of the political economy, philosophy, legal theory, jurisprudence, psychology, and comparative methodology that together constitute the theoretical architecture of the kind of Marxian scholarship that the Centre exemplifies and that Kafi's own work represents.

Throughout, we attend to the latest developments in each of the fields we survey, including the most recent contributions from 2024 and 2025 in Marxian economics, critical legal theory, political philosophy, postcolonial theory, and the sociology of knowledge. These recent developments are not mere additions to an otherwise settled body of theory. They represent genuinely new advances in our understanding of the problems that Kafi's work has been grappling with, and they illuminate aspects of that work that earlier theoretical frameworks could not fully account for.

CHAPTER ONE: THE CENTRE FOR MARXIAN STUDIES: AN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY, 1995 TO THE PRESENT

1.1 The Founding Moment and Its Significance

The Centre for Marxian Studies at Jadavpur University was established in 1995, though the year of its formal anniversary is sometimes reckoned from 1998, the 150th year of the Communist Manifesto's publication, which gave the Centre's founding a symbolic additional weight. Understanding the significance of this founding requires attending to the specific historical moment in which it occurred. The mid-1990s were a critical juncture in global intellectual history. The Soviet Union had collapsed in 1991, and the triumphalist proclamations of the "end of history" by liberal commentators had made it fashionable in many quarters to dismiss Marxism as a dead ideology, a failed experiment in social engineering whose intellectual resources had been exhausted along with its political credibility.

In this context, the founding of a Centre for Marxian Studies at one of India's most prestigious universities was an act of considerable intellectual courage. It was a statement, made publicly and institutionally, that Marxism remained a living and indispensable set of analytical tools for understanding the world, that the collapse of actually existing socialism did not entail the refutation of Marx's critique of capitalism, and that the growing dominance of neoliberal ideology in the post-Cold War world made the Marxian analysis of capitalist structures more urgently necessary than ever, not less.

This founding judgment has been vindicated by subsequent history in ways that could not have been fully anticipated in 1995. The Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998, the collapse of the dot-com bubble in 2000-2001, the catastrophic global financial crisis of 2008-2009, the subsequent decade of austerity and growing inequality, the accelerating climate crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2022 and its devastating effects on working-class and poor communities worldwide, the intensification of imperialist competition and the return of large-scale military conflict: all of these developments have confirmed the continuing relevance of the Marxian analysis of capitalism's fundamental contradictions and its systematic production of inequality, exploitation, and crisis.

The founding Coordinator of the Centre was Professor Debesh Chakraborty from the Department of Economics, a choice that was significant in several ways. First, it reflected an understanding that Marxism's primary analytical contribution lies in its political economy, its analysis of the

capitalist mode of production and its consequences for social life. Second, it established from the beginning the genuinely interdisciplinary character of the Centre, since a Centre for Marxian Studies in the Faculty of Arts that begins with an economist as Coordinator is already refusing the conventional disciplinary divisions. Third, it connected the Centre to the specific tradition of Indian Marxian economics, which had by 1995 developed a sophisticated set of analytical tools for understanding the specific forms taken by capitalist development and underdevelopment in the post-colonial world.

The decision to situate the Centre within the Faculty of Arts rather than within the social science faculties is itself philosophically interesting. It reflects a conception of Marxism that is not merely social scientific but also humanistic: a conviction that the analysis of capitalism and its consequences requires attending to the cultural, literary, and aesthetic dimensions of social life, not only to its economic and political structures. This conviction is deeply Marxian in the broad sense: Marx himself, as early as the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, was concerned with the cultural and psychological dimensions of alienation, with the ways in which capitalist production shapes not only the economic circumstances of workers but their very subjectivity, their sense of themselves, their relationships with each other and with nature. The Centre's location in the Faculty of Arts honors this dimension of Marxian thought, and it has shaped the kind of interdisciplinary dialogue that the Centre has fostered throughout its history.

1.2 Building an Intellectual Community: The Early Years

The Centre's early years were marked by the effort to build an intellectual community that could sustain the kind of interdisciplinary, theoretically ambitious dialogue that its founding vision required. This required establishing connections both within Jadavpur and with scholars and intellectuals from across India and the world.

Within Jadavpur, the Centre drew on the remarkable concentration of intellectual talent that the university's Faculty of Arts had accumulated over the preceding decades. The Departments of Bengali, Comparative Literature, English, History, Philosophy, Political Science, and Economics all contained scholars whose work engaged with Marxian ideas in various ways, and the Centre provided a forum within which these scholars could come into dialogue with each other across disciplinary lines. The experience of that dialogue, of discovering the connections between one's own disciplinary concerns and those of scholars working in adjacent but different fields, has been one of the most productive intellectual experiences that the Centre has fostered.

Beyond Jadavpur, the Centre established connections with a remarkable array of Marxian intellectuals from across India and the world. The list of scholars who have participated in the Centre's seminars over its thirty years of existence constitutes a kind of intellectual genealogy of the most significant Marxian thought in our time. Economists like Amiya Kumar Bagchi, Prabhat Patnaik, Utsa Patnaik, Samir Amin, and Surajit Mazumdar brought the tools of Marxian political economy to bear on the analysis of development, underdevelopment, imperialism, and the specific forms of capitalist transformation in the global South. Historians like Irfan Habib, Sumit Sarkar, and Sobhanlal Datta Gupta brought the methods of historical materialism to the analysis of Indian and world history. Literary critics and cultural theorists like Aijaz Ahmad, Himani Bannerji, Malini Bhattacharya, Modhumita Roy, and Vivek Chibber brought the

resources of Marxian cultural theory to the analysis of literature, cinema, gender, and postcolonial identity. Philosophers and political theorists like Achin Vanaik, Ramkrishna Bhattacharya, and Craig Brandist brought sophisticated philosophical analysis to the foundational questions of Marxian thought.

This community of scholars represents not a monolithic or unified theoretical position but a genuine intellectual diversity within a shared commitment to Marxian analysis. The debates within this community, between different approaches to political economy, between different assessments of postcolonial theory, between different understandings of the relationship between Marxism and other critical traditions, have been among the most productive intellectual encounters in Indian academic life over the past three decades.

1.3 Abdul Kafi and the Transition to New Coordination

The transition of the Centre's coordination to Abdul Kafi represents both a continuity with its founding vision and a development of that vision in new directions. Kafi inherited from his predecessors as Coordinator a Centre that had established its reputation, its network of connections, and its basic intellectual program. His task has been to sustain and develop that inheritance while also responding to the new intellectual and political challenges that have emerged since the Centre's founding.

The new challenges have been considerable. The rise of Hindu nationalism and the Bharatiya Janata Party's consolidation of power at the national level in 2014 and its subsequent strengthening have created a new political environment for Indian intellectual life that is in many ways more hostile to Marxian and progressive scholarship than the environment of the 1990s. The rolling back of academic freedom, the politically motivated interference in university governance, the use of nationalist ideology to delegitimize critical scholarship: all of these have placed new pressures on institutions like the Centre for Marxian Studies.

At the same time, the intellectual landscape has been transformed by developments in theory that have both enriched and complicated the Marxian tradition. The debates about postcolonial theory, about the relationship between Marxism and feminism, about the implications of ecological crisis for Marxian political economy, about the emergence of new forms of capitalism associated with digital technology and platform economies: all of these have required new theoretical work and new dialogue between different traditions of critical thought.

Kafi's response to these challenges has been to deepen the Centre's engagement with precisely those traditions and questions where the need for new thinking is greatest, while maintaining the core commitment to Marxian political economy and historical materialism that has defined the Centre's intellectual identity from its founding. His own work in Bengali literary history and Marxian cultural criticism has contributed directly to several of these areas, and his coordination of the Centre has created the institutional conditions within which other scholars can make similar contributions.

1.4 The Centre in the Current Moment: 2024 and 2025

As of 2024 and 2025, the Centre for Marxian Studies continues to function as one of the most important forums for Marxian scholarship in South Asia. The Joint Coordinator is Suchetana Chattopadhyay, Professor in the Department of History, whose own work on the history of the Communist movement in Bengal and on colonial history brings a different but complementary disciplinary perspective to the Centre's work.

The current intellectual program of the Centre reflects the convergence of several major theoretical and political concerns. The analysis of the political economy of neoliberalism and its specific impacts on India and West Bengal remains central. The engagement with the new forms of imperialism associated with the rise of China and the restructuring of global capitalism has generated new debates about the continuing relevance of classical theories of imperialism and the need for their revision. The question of climate change and ecological crisis, and its implications for Marxian political economy's traditional emphasis on the development of productive forces, has become increasingly urgent. The analysis of caste and its relationship to class and capitalism, a question of fundamental importance in the Indian context that classical Marxism has often undertheorized, has been receiving renewed and more sophisticated attention.

In the specific domain of cultural and literary theory, the Centre's program has continued to engage with the intersection of Marxian analysis and the study of Bengali and Indian literature, cinema, and popular culture. Recent seminars have addressed topics including the political economy of the publishing industry in Bengal, the representation of labor in contemporary Bengali fiction, the cultural politics of the BJP's cultural nationalism, and the aesthetics of anti-capitalist art in the digital age.

Kafi's own scholarly work within and beyond the Centre continues to develop in directions that are responsive to these new intellectual challenges. While his foundational work in the analysis of the three texts (Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, Langol) remains his best-known contribution, his ongoing research and teaching engage with a much wider range of questions about the relationship between language, literature, politics, and social transformation.

1.5 Theoretical Debates and the Centre's Intellectual Identity

A Centre for Marxian Studies necessarily has to navigate the complex landscape of debates and disagreements within the Marxian tradition itself. These are not merely academic disputes. They reflect genuine disagreements about how to analyze the world and how to transform it, and the intellectual health of the Centre depends on its ability to engage seriously with these disagreements rather than pretending that the Marxian tradition speaks with a single voice.

The most significant debates that have engaged the Centre over its history can be organized around several key questions. The first is the question of political economy: how should Marxian economics be developed in the twenty-first century in response to the transformation of capitalism? The second is the question of history and agency: how does the Marxian analysis of structural forces relate to the analysis of political subjects and their capacity for transformation? The third is the question of culture and ideology: what is the relationship between the economic base and the cultural and ideological superstructure, and how should Marxian cultural criticism approach this relationship? The fourth is the question of identity and difference: how does the

Marxian emphasis on class relate to the analysis of other forms of social difference, including gender, caste, religion, and postcolonial identity? And the fifth is the methodological question: what is the proper relationship between theory and practice, between abstract analysis and concrete political engagement?

Each of these debates has developed within the Centre's seminars and discussions in ways that are specific to the Indian and Bengali context while also engaging with the international debates in each area. The result is an intellectual conversation that is both globally informed and locally grounded, and that contributes to the development of a specifically South Asian Marxian intellectual tradition that neither slavishly imitates European Marxism nor rejects the resources of that tradition in the name of a nativist alternative.

CHAPTER TWO: PHILOSOPHY OF PRAXIS: FROM HEGEL TO CONTEMPORARY MARXIAN THEORY

2.1 The Hegelian Heritage and Its Transformation

No serious engagement with Marxian philosophy can avoid the question of its relationship to Hegel, because Marx's own philosophical development was fundamentally shaped by his engagement with and transformation of Hegelian thought. Understanding this relationship, and the way in which it continues to structure contemporary Marxian philosophy, is essential for understanding the philosophical foundations of the kind of scholarship represented by the Centre for Marxian Studies and by Abdul Kafi's own intellectual work.

Hegel's philosophy represents the most ambitious attempt in modern intellectual history to understand reality as a dynamic, self-developing whole. For Hegel, the categories through which we understand the world are not static and fixed but are themselves in constant development, each category generating its opposite through a process of internal contradiction, and the conflict of opposites being resolved at a higher level of conceptual development. This process, which Hegel called the dialectic, operates not only in thought but in history: the development of human history is, for Hegel, the development of consciousness toward ever more adequate self-understanding, a process driven by the contradictions that each historical configuration generates within itself.

Marx's great transformation of Hegel was his "inversion" of the Hegelian dialectic. Where Hegel had understood the dialectic as fundamentally a movement of thought, of consciousness coming to know itself, Marx argued that the primary reality is not thought but material production: the ways in which human beings organize their collective labor to produce the means of their subsistence. Consciousness, for Marx, does not develop on its own logic but is shaped by the material conditions of production. The ideologies, philosophies, religions, and cultural forms of any historical period are not autonomous creations of pure thought but are, at a fundamental level, shaped by the economic relations of that period and the interests they generate. This is the core of historical materialism.

But this formulation, taken in isolation, can make it sound as though Marx reduced everything to economics in a crude and mechanical way. The sophisticated philosophical tradition that has developed from Marx's work, and that informs the scholarship of the Centre for Marxian Studies, is marked by its resistance to this mechanical reduction. The most important philosophical development within Marxism in the twentieth century was the elaboration of what Antonio Gramsci called the "philosophy of praxis": an understanding of Marxism not as a mechanistic science that predicts the course of history on the basis of economic laws but as a philosophy of active, conscious human transformation of the world.

2.2 Antonio Gramsci and the Philosophy of Praxis

Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist who wrote his most important theoretical work in prison during the years of Fascist rule in Italy (1926-1935), is perhaps the single most important figure in the development of a philosophical Marxism that is adequate to the complexity of cultural and political life. His concept of "hegemony," his analysis of the "organic intellectual," his theory of the "war of position" in contrast to the "war of maneuver," his reflections on the relationship between "common sense" and philosophy, and his insistence on the historical specificity of all theoretical concepts: these contributions have been enormously influential across the entire range of Marxian scholarship, from political theory to cultural studies to literary criticism.

The concept of hegemony is perhaps Gramsci's most important contribution to Marxian thought, and it is also the concept most relevant to understanding the kind of intellectual work that the Centre for Marxian Studies represents. For Gramsci, hegemony refers to the way in which a dominant class maintains its power not merely through coercion but through the active consent of the dominated classes, a consent that is produced and maintained through the institutions of civil society, including schools, universities, churches, media, political parties, and cultural organizations. Hegemony is the cultural and ideological dimension of class power: it is the way in which a particular class's understanding of the world, its values, its norms, its categories of thought, comes to be experienced as natural, universal, and inevitable by those whom it subordinates.

The implications of this concept for the understanding of intellectual and academic work are profound. If hegemony is produced and maintained through cultural and intellectual institutions, then those institutions are themselves sites of political struggle. The university, on this analysis, is not a neutral space in which pure knowledge is pursued in isolation from political interests. It is a site where the dominant ideology is reproduced, challenged, negotiated, and potentially transformed. Scholars who work within the Gramscian framework understand their own intellectual work as necessarily positioned within this struggle, even when it takes the apparently neutral form of literary analysis or historical research.

This understanding is central to the intellectual culture of the Centre for Marxian Studies and to Abdul Kafi's own scholarly practice. When Kafi analyzes the three texts of his major work, he is not engaged in a neutral act of aesthetic appreciation or historical description. He is engaged in what Gramsci would call "counter-hegemonic" intellectual work: the recovery and illumination of cultural resources that challenge the dominant ideological framework, that reveal the historical

contingency of arrangements that present themselves as natural, and that open up the imaginative space for thinking differently about the world.

2.3 Louis Althusser and the Theory of Ideological State Apparatuses

Another major influence on the philosophical tradition within which the Centre's work is situated is the French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, whose "structural Marxism" represented a significant, if controversial, development in Marxian philosophy in the 1960s and 1970s. Althusser's contribution to Marxian cultural and literary theory was primarily through his concept of "Ideological State Apparatuses" (ISAs), a concept that has been enormously influential in the analysis of education, culture, and media from a Marxian perspective.

For Althusser, the state maintains the conditions for capitalist reproduction not only through its repressive apparatuses (the police, the army, the courts, the prisons) but also through a range of ideological apparatuses that operate primarily through ideology rather than coercion. These include the educational system, the family, the media, and cultural institutions, including universities. The educational ISA is, for Althusser, particularly important in advanced capitalist societies, because it is the primary site through which the ideology of the dominant class is reproduced in the new generation and through which individuals are "interpolated" (hailed, called into being) as subjects who occupy specific positions within the relations of production.

The application of this framework to the analysis of the university, and specifically to the analysis of a department of Bengali literature within an Indian university, generates insights of considerable importance. The study of literature within the academic institution is not a neutral encounter with texts. It involves the reproduction of specific modes of reading, specific canons of valued texts, specific assumptions about what literary quality means and why it matters, and specific forms of subjectivity that are appropriate to the university-educated reader. These modes, canons, assumptions, and forms of subjectivity are not natural or inevitable. They reflect specific historical and class interests, and the dominance of particular reading practices within the academy is itself an expression of hegemonic power.

The tradition of Marxian literary criticism within which Kafi's work is situated is, from this perspective, an attempt to develop counter-hegemonic reading practices: modes of engaging with literary texts that reveal their historical and political dimensions, that challenge the dominant construction of literary value, and that open up the study of literature to the experiences and perspectives of those who have been marginalized by the canonical tradition. The choice of Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol as the central texts of Kafi's major work is itself a challenge to the canonical hierarchy that has traditionally placed the symbolist drama of Tagore above the political journalism of Nazrul and the revolutionary poetry of the communist press.

2.4 The Frankfurt School: Critical Theory and Cultural Analysis

The Frankfurt School of critical theory, associated with figures like Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, and Jurgen Habermas, represents another major strand in the philosophical tradition of Marxian cultural analysis that informs the work of the Centre for Marxian Studies. The Frankfurt School's contribution to Marxian thought was

primarily in the analysis of culture, mass media, and the ways in which advanced capitalism manages to integrate potential sources of opposition into the system through the commercialization of cultural life.

Adorno and Horkheimer's concept of the "culture industry," developed in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), argued that mass culture under capitalism does not genuinely satisfy human needs but administers those needs in ways that reproduce conformity and passivity. The entertainment industry, the popular press, and the mass media generally, on this analysis, are not simply innocent providers of pleasure but are instruments of a systematic management of consciousness that prevents the development of the critical faculties necessary for genuine social transformation.

Walter Benjamin's contributions are, in many ways, more directly relevant to the kind of literary historical analysis that Kafi's work exemplifies. Benjamin's concept of the "dialectical image" offers a way of understanding how historical moments of significance are preserved in cultural forms and can be recovered and reactivated in the present. Benjamin's method of the "constellation," his practice of placing disparate texts and cultural fragments in relation to each other in ways that produce unexpected illuminations, anticipates something of the comparative method that Kafi employs when he reads Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol together.

Benjamin's famous essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935) raises questions about the political consequences of technological changes in the reproduction and dissemination of cultural works that remain acutely relevant in the age of digital media. Benjamin argued that the mechanical reproduction of art destroys its "aura," its unique character as an original object bound to a specific place and time, and that this destruction could have either emancipatory or reactionary consequences depending on the political context and the uses to which the new technologies of reproduction are put. In the era of social media, streaming platforms, and algorithmic curation of cultural content, these questions have acquired new urgency, and the debates between Adorno's cultural pessimism and Benjamin's more cautiously optimistic assessment of the political potentials of mass culture continue to be productive.

2.5 Georg Lukacs Revisited: Reification, Totality, and the Literary Form

Georg Lukacs, whom we encountered in Part Two in the context of the debate about realism and modernism, is also a central figure in the philosophical tradition that informs the Centre's work. His philosophical masterpiece, *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), remains one of the most important contributions to Marxian philosophy of the twentieth century, particularly for its development of the concept of "reification" and its analysis of the proletariat as the "identical subject-object of history."

The concept of reification is Lukacs's development of Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism in *Capital*. For Marx, the commodity form involves a mysterious inversion: the social relations between people appear in the form of relations between things, so that the social character of labor appears not as a direct relationship between workers but as a property of the commodities they produce. This inversion is what Marx calls commodity fetishism. Lukacs generalizes this analysis into a broader account of the way in which capitalist society systematically transforms

all social relations, all human activities, and all aspects of consciousness into the form of things with fixed, calculable properties. This generalized process of transformation is what Lukacs calls reification.

The concept of reification is enormously productive for the analysis of culture, because it allows us to understand how the specific formal properties of cultural objects, their aesthetic structures, their narrative forms, their representational conventions, are shaped by the reifying tendencies of capitalist social relations. A literary form that presents social relations as fixed and inevitable, that portrays individuals as isolated atoms whose fate is determined by natural or metaphysical forces beyond their control, is, from a Lukacian perspective, a reified form that reproduces the ideological mystifications of capitalism. A literary form that reveals the historical contingency of social arrangements, that illuminates the social contradictions that give rise to individual fates, and that opens up the possibility of collective transformation, is a de-reifying form that challenges the ideological mystifications of capitalism.

This framework helps to illuminate the significance of the three texts that Kafi analyzes. Dhumketu's political journalism de-reifies the colonial situation by naming the social forces that produce it and calling for their transformation. Raktakarobi's symbolist drama de-reifies the capitalist production process by making visible, through the figure of the invisible King, the structural, impersonal character of capitalist power that everyday experience conceals. Langol's revolutionary poetry de-reifies the agrarian situation by representing the peasant not as a passive victim of natural or divine forces but as a historical agent capable of transforming the conditions of their existence.

2.6 Contemporary Marxian Philosophy: New Directions

The tradition of Marxian philosophy that we have been tracing has continued to develop in new and significant directions in recent decades, and the Centre for Marxian Studies has engaged with these new directions in its seminars and discussions. Several deserve specific attention.

The work of the Italian philosopher Antonio Negri, both alone and in collaboration with Michael Hardt, has generated enormous debate about the nature of contemporary capitalism and the new forms of political subjectivity it produces. Hardt and Negri's trilogy (*Empire*, 2000; *Multitude*, 2004; *Commonwealth*, 2009) argued that the transition to a form of capitalism centered on "immaterial labor," the production of ideas, relationships, and communication, has transformed both the structure of capitalist power and the nature of the working class. The concept of the "multitude," as a form of collective political subjectivity that replaces the traditional working class of industrial capitalism, has been both celebrated and subjected to searching criticism.

The critical response to Hardt and Negri from scholars affiliated with the Centre has been skeptical, and for good reasons. The emphasis on immaterial labor and the knowledge economy, while capturing something real about the transformation of capitalism in its centers, tends to obscure the continuing dominance of material labor, agrarian production, and extractive industries in the global periphery, including in India. The critique of Hardt and Negri from the perspective of postcolonial Marxism, associated particularly with the work of scholars like Vivek Chibber and Aijaz Ahmad, argues that the theory of empire fails to account adequately for the

continued importance of national states and national economies in the regulation of global capitalism, and that its concept of the multitude is insufficiently attentive to the specific forms of class, caste, and communal identity that structure political subjectivity in the global South.

More recently, the work associated with "Marxist humanism" has reasserted the importance of the early Marx, the Marx of the 1844 Manuscripts and *The German Ideology*, against the structuralist reading of Althusser that had dominated French Marxism in the 1960s and 1970s. Scholars like Moishe Postone, whose rereading of Marx's *Capital* (*Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 1993) has been enormously influential, argue that the central categories of Marxian theory, value, labor, capital, need to be understood not as referring to transhistorical features of human social life but as historically specific categories that describe the specific social forms of capitalist society. This rereading opens up new possibilities for understanding capitalism as a historically specific and therefore transformable set of social relations rather than as a natural or eternal order.

The engagement of Marxian philosophy with ecological crisis and climate change represents perhaps the most urgent current development in the tradition. The concept of "metabolic rift," developed by John Bellamy Foster and others from hints in Marx's own work, argues that capitalism systematically disrupts the metabolic relationship between human society and the natural world, appropriating natural resources at rates that exceed nature's capacity for regeneration and generating pollution and ecological damage that impose enormous costs on current and future generations. The analysis of climate change as a product of capitalist relations of production, not merely of industrialization as such, has profound implications for the politics of climate action: it implies that genuine solutions to the ecological crisis require not merely technological change but transformation of the social relations of production that drive the drive toward endless accumulation.

These developments in Marxian philosophy are directly relevant to the work of the Centre for Marxian Studies and to Abdul Kafi's own intellectual program. The Centre's engagement with ecological questions, with the politics of the global South, with the specific forms of capitalist development in India, and with the cultural dimensions of political struggle: all of these are informed by and contribute to the development of the philosophical tradition we have been tracing.

CHAPTER THREE: POLITICAL ECONOMY, DEVELOPMENT, AND THE COLONIAL LEGACY

3.1 The Political Economy of Colonialism: Historical Foundations

The political economy that has been most central to the intellectual work of the Centre for Marxian Studies is not abstract theory but a theory deeply engaged with the specific historical experience of colonialism and its continuing consequences for the societies of the global South. Understanding this political economy requires beginning with the analysis of colonialism itself,

not as a moral catastrophe to be condemned but as a specific economic and political system to be analyzed in terms of its structural logic and its long-term consequences.

The Marxian analysis of colonialism begins with Marx's own observations about the role of colonial plunder in the "primitive accumulation" of capital. In *Capital*, Marx argued that the origins of capitalist accumulation lay not in the patient savings of virtuous merchants and manufacturers, as bourgeois economic theory suggested, but in violence: the enclosure of common land, the dispossession of peasants, the slave trade, and the colonial extraction of resources from the Americas, Africa, and Asia. Colonialism was not an accidental accompaniment to the rise of capitalism in Europe. It was a structural feature of capitalist development from its earliest period, providing both the resources and the markets without which European capitalism could not have developed as it did.

This Marxian analysis of colonialism was developed and deepened by a series of thinkers who grappled with the specific situation of the colonized world in the twentieth century. Rosa Luxemburg, in *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913), argued that capitalism requires constant access to non-capitalist territories in order to realize its surplus value, and that imperialism is therefore a structural necessity of capitalism, not merely a political choice of capitalist states. Lenin, in *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916), argued that the monopoly capitalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had entered a phase of imperialism characterized by the export of capital to colonial territories, the partition of the world among competing imperial powers, and the intensification of inter-imperialist competition to the point of world war.

These classical analyses have been developed and refined by subsequent generations of Marxian economists. The contribution of Indian scholars to this tradition has been particularly significant, and much of this work has been discussed in the seminars of the Centre for Marxian Studies.

3.2 Drain of Wealth and the Colonial Economy

The concept of the "drain of wealth" from India to Britain during the colonial period is one of the most important contributions of Indian Marxian political economy to the understanding of colonialism. The analysis was first developed in systematic form by Dadabhai Naoroji in his *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (1901), where he argued that British rule imposed a systematic drain of resources from India to Britain through taxation, the home charges (the costs of administering the colony that were charged to India), the remittance of profits, and the terms of trade that favored British manufactured goods over Indian goods.

This analysis has been developed by subsequent scholars, most recently and powerfully by Utsa Patnaik, whose research has estimated the total drain of wealth from India to Britain during the colonial period in the hundreds of billions of pounds at current values. Patnaik's methodology involves tracing the mechanism through which the colonial government used tax revenues to purchase India's export surplus, remitting the proceeds to Britain as "home charges" and profits. This mechanism allowed Britain to import Indian goods without paying for them in foreign exchange, effectively transferring the value of India's exports to Britain without reciprocal payment.

The implications of this analysis for understanding the contemporary economic situation of India and other former colonies are profound. If the relative underdevelopment of post-colonial economies is not a product of natural disadvantages or cultural deficiencies but of a systematic extraction of resources during the colonial period, then the conventional development economics framework, which treats underdevelopment as a problem of insufficient domestic savings and investment to be solved by integration into the global market, is fundamentally inadequate. The development of the formerly colonized world requires not merely accelerated accumulation along the lines set by colonial capitalism but a genuine transformation of the global economic relations that the colonial period established and that continue to shape contemporary development trajectories.

This analysis is central to the intellectual program of the Centre for Marxian Studies and is deeply relevant to Kafi's own understanding of the relationship between colonial history and contemporary politics. When he reads *Dhumketu*, *Raktakarobi*, and *Langol* in the context of the 1920s, he is reading texts produced in the context of an economy that was being systematically drained to support British capital, and this economic context is not merely background. It is constitutive of the political problems that the texts address and the political demands that they embody.

3.3 Amiya Kumar Bagchi and the History of Indian Capitalism

Among the economists who have participated in the Centre's seminars, Amiya Kumar Bagchi holds a particularly important place, both because of the significance of his scholarly contributions and because his work is directly relevant to the historical questions that Kafi's literary scholarship addresses. Bagchi's work spans a remarkable range: from his early analysis of the de-industrialization of Bengal under British rule (*Private Investment in India*, 1966) to his magisterial intellectual history of capitalism (*The Developmental State in History and in the Twentieth Century*, 2004) to his late work on the political economy of human development (*Perilous Passage: Mankind and the Global Ascendancy of Capital*, 2005).

Bagchi's work on the de-industrialization of Bengal is particularly important for understanding the historical context of the texts that Kafi analyzes. Bagchi documented in careful detail how British colonial policy systematically destroyed the pre-existing handicraft industries of Bengal, including the famous muslin weaving industry, through a combination of discriminatory taxation, tariff policies that favored British machine-made goods, and the political suppression of organized resistance. This process of de-industrialization created the conditions of mass poverty and rural distress that provided the social base for the revolutionary movements of the early twentieth century and the political urgency that animated the texts of *Dhumketu* and *Langol*.

Understanding this economic history illuminates the texts in ways that purely literary or political analysis cannot. When *Langol's* poetry celebrates the peasant and the plough, it is not merely a romantic idealization of rural life. It is a response to the specific conditions of agrarian distress created by a century of colonial exploitation: the collapse of the handicraft economy, the conversion of peasants from weavers to pure agricultural laborers, the rack-renting of zamindars backed by colonial law, the destruction of the traditional social fabric that had bound

communities together. The political urgency of the poetry is inseparable from this economic context.

3.4 Prabhat Patnaik and the Contemporary Analysis of Capitalism

Prabhat Patnaik is the contemporary Marxian economist whose work is most directly relevant to the understanding of the current conjuncture, and his participation in the Centre's seminars has been a significant influence on the intellectual direction of the Centre's current program. Patnaik's work spans several decades and addresses a range of questions in Marxian political economy, but his most distinctive and important contributions concern the analysis of contemporary capitalism and its crisis tendencies.

Patnaik's analysis of "financialization," the increasing dominance of financial capital over the real economy, extends the classical Marxian analysis of imperialism into the current period. He argues that the liberalization of international capital flows that has been a central feature of the neoliberal era has given international financial capital a power over national governments that is qualitatively different from the imperialism of the classical period. By threatening to withdraw capital from any country that adopts policies that restrict corporate profits or redistribute income, international financial capital effectively constrains the policy space available to elected governments, preventing them from implementing the kinds of redistributive and developmental policies that their electorates may demand. This constraint is what Patnaik calls the "captive state": the state that is politically sovereign but economically subordinate to the dictates of international capital.

The implications of this analysis for Indian political economy are profound and directly relevant to the context within which the Centre for Marxian Studies operates. The liberalization of the Indian economy from 1991 onward has been accompanied by a progressive reduction in the state's capacity to implement redistributive policies, a growing inequality of income and wealth, a marginalization of agriculture and the agrarian poor, and a commodification of public services including education and healthcare. The political consequences of these developments include both the growth of a middle-class consumerism oriented toward global markets and the deepening of the social frustrations and resentments that have fueled the rise of Hindu nationalism.

3.5 Samir Amin and the World-Systems Perspective

Samir Amin, the Egyptian-French economist who passed away in 2018 after a career spanning more than six decades of engagement with the political economy of the global South, was one of the most important international visitors to the Centre for Marxian Studies. His work on "unequal exchange" and "accumulation on a world scale" represents a distinctive synthesis of Marxian political economy with the "world-systems" perspective associated with Immanuel Wallerstein.

Amin's central argument is that the capitalist world system is fundamentally structured by an asymmetry between "center" and "periphery" that cannot be overcome within the framework of capitalism itself. The center, consisting of the advanced capitalist countries, benefits from a systematic process of "unequal exchange" with the periphery: when goods are exchanged at

prices determined by global markets, the periphery's goods are undervalued relative to the center's goods because the peripheral countries lack the technological, organizational, and political power to command the prices that reflect the full value of their labor. This unequal exchange systematically transfers value from the periphery to the center, maintaining and deepening the structural asymmetry between them.

The implication of Amin's analysis, which he drew out explicitly in his later work on "delinking," is that genuine development in the periphery requires a degree of disengagement from the global market, the prioritization of domestic economic goals over integration into the global division of labor, and the development of what Amin called "autocentric" accumulation oriented toward the satisfaction of the needs of the domestic population rather than toward export markets and the requirements of international capital. This is a position that directly challenges the neoliberal development orthodoxy, and it connects to a long tradition of heterodox thinking about development in India that stretches from Gandhi's critique of industrial civilization to Nehru's state-led development strategy to the current debates about the appropriate role of the state in development.

3.6 The Political Economy of Education and the University

The Centre for Marxian Studies operates within an institution, the university, that is itself subject to the political economy of contemporary India and the pressures of neoliberal restructuring. The political economy of higher education in India is itself a topic of significant importance for understanding the context within which scholars like Abdul Kafi work.

Since the liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991, the higher education system has been subjected to increasing pressure to conform to the logic of the market. The expansion of private higher education, the reduction of state funding for public universities, the introduction of fees and the commodification of education, the pressure to orient curricula toward "employability" and the needs of industry, the adoption of managerial models of governance that prioritize "efficiency" and "accountability" over academic freedom: all of these trends have transformed the landscape of Indian higher education in ways that directly affect the conditions within which critical scholarship can be pursued.

Jadavpur University has been significantly affected by these trends. As a public university that depends heavily on state government funding, it has been subject to the fiscal constraints imposed by the West Bengal state government's own fiscal situation, which is itself shaped by the broader political economy of Indian federalism and the distribution of fiscal resources between the central and state governments. The university's ability to maintain its commitment to academic freedom, to support interdisciplinary research, and to sustain institutions like the Centre for Marxian Studies has been dependent on a combination of its own research productivity (which generates grants and external funding), the political commitment of its faculty and students to academic freedom, and the continuing prestige of its intellectual reputation.

The political economy of academic knowledge production is itself a topic that Marxian analysis illuminates. The growing dominance of citation metrics, impact factors, and research output

indices in the evaluation of academic work reflects the application of market logic to intellectual production: academic work is assessed not by its intrinsic intellectual significance but by its measurable contribution to a kind of academic market in which attention, citations, and publications serve as forms of intellectual capital. This transformation of academic evaluation has significant ideological consequences. It tends to favor work that is technically sophisticated and narrowly specialized over work that is broadly humanistic and politically engaged. It tends to privilege publications in international (predominantly English-language) journals over contributions to regional or vernacular intellectual traditions. And it tends to impose the standards and categories of the academic centers on the intellectual work of the periphery.

Kafi's own scholarly practice, which involves publishing in Bengali and in Bengali academic contexts, which prioritizes engagement with the specific problems of Bengali intellectual culture over integration into international academic markets, and which values the kind of deep, politically engaged literary scholarship represented by his work on the three texts, is a form of resistance to this transformation of academic value. It is a commitment to a different understanding of what scholarly work is for: not the accumulation of academic capital but the production of knowledge in the service of human emancipation.

CHAPTER FOUR: LEGAL PHILOSOPHY, JURISPRUDENCE, AND THE CRITIQUE OF LAW

4.1 Marxian Legal Theory: Foundational Concepts

The relationship between Marxian theory and legal philosophy is complex and often underappreciated. While it is true that classical Marxism tended to treat law as part of the ideological superstructure that reflects and serves the interests of the dominant class in the economic base, the actual Marxian tradition of legal analysis is considerably more sophisticated than this schematic formulation suggests. Understanding the Marxian critique of law is important for understanding the full range of the intellectual framework within which Abdul Kafi's scholarship operates, because the legal dimension of colonial and postcolonial power is inseparable from its economic and cultural dimensions.

Marx's own engagements with law were primarily critical. In his early journalistic writings, particularly his articles on the freedom of the press and on the law concerning the theft of wood (1842), Marx demonstrated how laws that present themselves as universal protections of rights are in fact instruments for the protection of specific class interests. The law prohibiting the theft of wood, for example, criminalized a practice that had traditionally been accepted for the rural poor gathering wood from forests, in order to protect the private property rights of landowners who were transforming those forests into commercial timber resources. The law's claim to impartiality and universality concealed the specific class interests it served.

This critical insight, that law presents itself as universal and neutral while in fact serving specific class interests, is the starting point of Marxian legal theory. But the tradition of Marxian legal

scholarship has developed this insight in many directions, some of which take us well beyond the simple base-superstructure model.

4.2 Evgeny Pashukanis and the Commodity Form Theory of Law

The most important early contribution to Marxian legal theory was made by the Soviet legal theorist Evgeny Pashukanis in his *General Theory of Law and Marxism* (1924). Pashukanis argued that the specific form of modern law, as a system of abstract, formal rules that treat all subjects as formally equal bearers of rights, is not an eternal or universal feature of all social organization but is a historically specific product of the commodity form.

The argument is subtle and important. In a society organized around commodity exchange, the fundamental social relationship is the exchange of equivalents: each party to an exchange gives something of equal value to what they receive. But for this exchange to be possible, both parties must be recognized as formally equal owners of their respective commodities, as autonomous subjects with the right to dispose of their property as they choose. The legal form, the system of abstract rights and formal equality before the law, is the political complement of the commodity form: it creates the juridical fiction of equal subjects whose exchanges are free and voluntary, while obscuring the real inequalities of power and wealth that determine the outcomes of those exchanges.

The implications of this analysis for the understanding of colonial law are particularly significant. British colonial law in India presented itself as a modernizing force, introducing the rule of law, formal equality before the law, and the protection of individual rights into a society presumed to be governed by arbitrary traditional authority. But from the Pashukanian perspective, this colonial law was not a neutral civilizing force but the legal form of the capitalist commodity economy that colonial rule was imposing on India: the legal framework necessary for the extraction of land, labor, and resources from Indian society in the service of British capital.

The land tenure legislation of the colonial period provides a clear example. The introduction of individual property rights in land, through legislation like the Permanent Settlement of 1793, destroyed the complex system of customary rights and obligations that had governed access to land in pre-colonial Bengal, converting land into a commodity that could be bought and sold, mortgaged and foreclosed. This legal transformation served the interests of capital by creating a class of large landowners whose rents could be taxed to fund the colonial administration and whose estates could be used for commercial agriculture. For the peasant cultivators who had previously had customary rights to the land they worked, the legal transformation meant the replacement of those customary rights with the formal legal right of the landlord to evict them for non-payment of rent.

4.3 Colonial Law and Its Legacy in Postcolonial India

The colonial legal system that the British established in India was not abolished at independence. It was inherited, with modifications, by the postcolonial state, and many of its fundamental features continue to shape the legal landscape of contemporary India. Understanding this

inheritance is essential for understanding the continuing relevance of the Marxian critique of law to the Indian context.

The most significant legacy of colonial law in India is the property regime that colonial legislation established. The Permanent Settlement and subsequent land legislation created a class of large landlords whose property rights in land were legally protected by colonial courts. While the post-independence land reform legislation in some states, most notably West Bengal under the Left Front government, introduced measures of tenancy reform and ceiling legislation that partially redistributed land, the fundamental structure of private property in land that colonial law established remains in place, and its consequences for the agrarian poor continue to be felt.

In West Bengal, the land reform program implemented by the Left Front government from the late 1970s onward represents one of the most significant redistributive land reforms in Indian history. The implementation of Operation Barga, which recorded the tenancy rights of sharecroppers and gave them legal security of tenure, significantly improved the conditions of a large section of the rural poor. The subsequent distribution of ceiling-surplus land to the landless further contributed to the redistribution of the agrarian economy. These reforms were made possible by the political power of the left in West Bengal, and they demonstrate the potential of legal reform, operating within the framework of capitalist property relations, to improve the conditions of the poor.

But the limits of legal reform within the framework of capitalist property relations are equally instructive. Despite the land reforms, rural poverty in West Bengal remained widespread, and the gains of the land reform were gradually eroded by the processes of differentiation and accumulation that capitalism inevitably produces. The failure of the Left Front government to go beyond land reform to a more thoroughgoing transformation of agrarian relations, combined with its accommodation to neoliberal economic policies from the 1990s onward, contributed to the political alienation that ultimately brought the Trinamool Congress to power in 2011.

The legal dimensions of the current political situation in India under the BJP government also require consideration. The use of law, and specifically criminal law, as an instrument of political suppression has been a defining feature of the current political environment. The application of sedition laws (themselves a colonial legal inheritance) to journalists, students, and academics who criticize government policy, the invocation of anti-terror legislation against civil society activists and Adivasi rights advocates (the Bhima Koregaon case and related proceedings), the use of the UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act) to imprison critics of the government without trial: all of these represent the use of the formal apparatus of the rule of law in the service of political repression, a development that Marxian legal theory has always insisted is a permanent possibility within any legal system that serves the interests of the dominant class.

4.4 B.R. Ambedkar, Caste, and the Limits of Legal Equality

No serious engagement with the question of law and its relationship to social inequality in the Indian context can avoid the work of B.R. Ambedkar, the towering figure of Dalit thought and the principal architect of the Indian Constitution. Ambedkar's work represents a challenge to

Marxian legal theory from within a tradition that shares many of its critical premises but insists on the irreducibility of caste to class.

Ambedkar argued throughout his career that caste is not merely an epiphenomenon of class but is an independent system of social stratification with its own logic and its own mechanisms of reproduction. The Dalit condition, for Ambedkar, is not primarily a product of economic exploitation (though it involves economic exploitation) but of a system of social degradation, untouchability, that operates through a complex of ritual, legal, and social practices that are not reducible to the economic relations of production. The legal abolition of untouchability in the Indian Constitution (Article 17) was an important achievement, but Ambedkar was under no illusion that legal reform alone could transform the deep social and cultural structures that sustained caste discrimination.

The Marxian tradition has often been criticized for its failure to take caste seriously as an autonomous system of oppression, tending to reduce caste to a form of class division and expecting that the overthrow of capitalism would automatically dissolve caste distinctions. This criticism has considerable force, and the engagement of the Marxian tradition with Ambedkar's work is one of the most important intellectual developments in contemporary Indian left theory. The Centre for Marxian Studies has contributed to this engagement through seminars and discussions that have taken seriously the challenge that caste presents to class-centered Marxian analysis.

The most productive engagements between Marxism and Ambedkar's thought involve neither the subsumption of caste into class nor the treatment of caste as an entirely separate and autonomous system, but the attempt to understand the specific articulation of caste and class in specific historical contexts. Ambedkar himself recognized the economic dimensions of caste: untouchability is associated with specific occupational roles, specific exclusions from productive resources, and specific forms of forced labor. The analysis of how caste and class intersect and reinforce each other in specific historical and economic contexts, rather than the abstract assertion of the priority of one over the other, is the most fruitful direction for this engagement.

4.5 Environmental Law, Indigenous Rights, and the Commons

One of the most important developments in contemporary legal theory from a Marxian perspective is the engagement with questions of environmental law, indigenous rights, and the commons. These questions are not new, but they have acquired a new urgency in the context of the accelerating ecological crisis and the intensification of struggles over land, water, and forest resources in India and across the global South.

The concept of the "commons" refers to resources that are held and managed collectively by communities, rather than being subject to either private property or state ownership. In pre-colonial India, the commons included forests, water bodies, common lands, and various other resources that communities managed collectively through systems of customary law and practice. The colonial legal system, as we have noted, systematically destroyed these commons through the introduction of private property rights and state ownership.

The ongoing destruction of commons in contemporary India, through processes of corporate land acquisition, forest enclosures, and the privatization of water resources, has generated significant resistance from Adivasi communities and other social movements. The legal frameworks through which this resistance operates include both the formal law of the Indian Constitution and the customary law and practice of affected communities. The tension between these different legal orders, and the political question of which has priority, is one of the most important sites of contemporary legal and political struggle in India.

From a Marxian perspective, the struggle for the commons is a struggle against the extension of capitalist property relations to resources that have previously been managed according to different social principles. The enclosure of the commons is, as Marx noted in *Capital*, a form of "primitive accumulation": the creation of the conditions for capitalist production by the dispossession of communities that had previously supported themselves outside the capitalist market. In the contemporary Indian context, this primitive accumulation is taking the form of "special economic zones," large-scale infrastructure projects, and corporate agricultural ventures that displace Adivasi and peasant communities from their land.

The legal response to these dispossessions includes both the mobilization of existing legal frameworks (constitutional guarantees, the Forest Rights Act of 2006, the Land Acquisition Act of 2013) and the advocacy for new legal frameworks that recognize the collective rights of communities over common resources. The political effectiveness of this legal response depends on the political power of the affected communities and their allies, demonstrating once again the Marxian insight that law is not an autonomous force for justice but is shaped by and reflects the balance of political forces.

4.6 Freedom of Speech, Academic Freedom, and the Law

The legal question of freedom of expression has particular relevance for the situation of scholars like Abdul Kafi who work in the tradition of Marxian critical scholarship. The relationship between academic freedom, freedom of speech, and the law is a complex and contested one, and it has been subject to increasing pressure in the current political environment in India.

Academic freedom, the freedom of scholars to pursue research and teaching without political interference, is grounded both in practical considerations (good scholarship requires freedom from political pressure) and in philosophical considerations (the pursuit of truth requires the ability to challenge received opinions). But academic freedom is not an absolute right: it exists within a legal framework that also protects other interests, including national security, the reputation of individuals, and the prevention of incitement to violence. The question of where to draw the line between legitimate restrictions on expression and the political suppression of critical speech is one that requires careful legal and philosophical analysis.

The invocation of sedition law against academics, students, and public intellectuals in contemporary India represents, from a Marxian perspective, an instance of the use of formal legal mechanisms in the service of political repression. The sedition provision (Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code), which was introduced by the British colonial government in 1870 as a tool for suppressing nationalist agitation, has been applied with increasing frequency to critics of

the current government, including scholars who have written critically about government policies and students who have participated in protests.

The challenge to this use of sedition law has proceeded both through the courts and through political mobilization. The legal challenges have met with mixed success: while the Supreme Court has, in some cases, held that the sedition provision cannot be applied to peaceful political expression, the practical effect of these decisions has been limited because the arrest, detention, and prosecution of critical voices can themselves serve as instruments of intimidation even when the charges are ultimately dismissed.

The 2019 incident in which Abdul Kafi was attacked by a former student provides a specific instance of the intersection of violence, law, and the politics of academic life. While the attack on Kafi was the act of an individual and cannot be attributed directly to the state or to political movements, it illustrates the ways in which the broader political atmosphere of intimidation can create conditions in which academic life becomes physically dangerous. The legal response to the attack, including the arrest and prosecution of the attacker, represents the functioning of the formal legal system in the protection of academic freedom, but it also illustrates the limits of legal protection: the formal law can provide redress after the fact but cannot necessarily prevent the intimidation and violence that a hostile political atmosphere encourages.

CHAPTER FIVE: PSYCHOLOGY, SUBJECTIVITY, AND THE LIFE OF THE MIND

5.1 The Psychology of the Intellectual: Self, Work, and World

The psychological dimensions of intellectual life are rarely addressed in textbooks on literary criticism or political philosophy, but they are essential for understanding the experience of being an intellectual in a specific historical and social context. Abdul Kafi's life and work, situated as they are at the intersection of multiple forms of social pressure, political conflict, and intellectual aspiration, provide rich material for a psychological analysis that complements the philosophical and political analysis we have pursued in the preceding chapters.

The psychology of intellectual life has been addressed from several different theoretical traditions, each of which offers insights of relevance to the understanding of Kafi's situation and work. We will draw on psychoanalytic theory, social psychology, the existentialist tradition, and the sociology of knowledge in developing an analysis that is genuinely interdisciplinary and genuinely relevant to the specific case at hand.

The starting point of any psychological analysis of intellectual life must be the fundamental question of motivation: why does someone choose to devote their life to the pursuit and communication of knowledge? This question may seem trivial, but it is not. The choice of an intellectual vocation, particularly a vocation that involves working within a politically engaged tradition like Marxian scholarship, involves a commitment that goes beyond career calculation. It involves a fundamental orientation toward the world, a way of understanding one's relationship

to society, history, and the pursuit of truth that shapes not only what one thinks but how one lives.

For someone in Kafi's situation, working within the tradition of Bengali Marxian scholarship and committed to the kind of politically engaged intellectual work represented by the Centre for Marxian Studies, the psychological dimensions of this vocation include several specific challenges. There is the challenge of maintaining intellectual commitment in the face of political adversity, the growing power of forces hostile to critical scholarship and to the tradition of academic freedom that the Centre represents. There is the challenge of sustaining the kind of deep, careful, and historically informed engagement with texts that Marxian literary scholarship demands, in the context of an academic environment that increasingly values rapid publication over sustained inquiry. There is the challenge of navigating the complex social position of a Muslim intellectual in a Hindu-majority institution in a West Bengal whose political culture has been transformed by the rise of the BJP and the intensification of communal politics. And there is the challenge represented by the specific incident of the 2019 attack, which imposed on Kafi the experience of physical vulnerability and the psychological aftermath of violence.

5.2 Psychoanalysis and the Social: Freud, Marcuse, and the Cultural Superego

The relationship between psychoanalytic theory and Marxian social criticism has been one of the most productive and contentious areas in twentieth-century critical thought. The Frankfurt School's engagement with Freud, most fully developed in Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (1955), attempted to synthesize the Marxian analysis of social structure with the psychoanalytic analysis of individual psychology in a way that could account for the psychological mechanisms through which social domination is reproduced and through which it might be overcome.

Freud's account of civilization, developed most fully in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), argued that civilization necessarily involves the renunciation of instinctual gratification: the repression of the sexual and aggressive drives in the service of the social cooperation that civilization requires. This repression produces the "discontents" of civilization: the anxiety, guilt, and neurosis that characterize modern psychological life. Freud was pessimistic about the possibility of significantly reducing this repression without undermining civilization itself.

Marcuse's contribution was to argue that the repression Freud described is not merely the inevitable price of civilization in general but is "surplus repression": repression in excess of what civilization actually requires, imposed by the specific social forms of capitalism in the service of the economic and political interests of the dominant class. If surplus repression is a historically specific product of capitalist social relations rather than a necessary feature of civilization, then the transformation of those social relations opens up the possibility of a civilization in which the relationship between the demands of social life and the needs of individuals is significantly less repressive.

This argument has implications for the understanding of intellectual life and its psychology. The intellectual who works within a Marxian critical tradition is engaged not merely in the production of knowledge but in a form of cultural practice that challenges the surplus repression

of capitalist society by insisting on the human possibility of a different social order. The psychological investment in this kind of work, the satisfaction it provides, and the frustrations it generates, all reflect the complex relationship between individual psychology and the social structures within which it is formed.

5.3 The Social Psychology of Identity: Class, Caste, Religion, and the Muslim Intellectual in Contemporary India

The social psychology of identity is particularly relevant to understanding the situation of a Muslim intellectual working in the tradition of Bengali Marxian scholarship in contemporary India. The question of identity, of how one understands oneself in relation to the multiple social categories that define one's position in society, is both a philosophical and a psychological question, and it has both theoretical and political dimensions.

The Muslim intellectual in contemporary India occupies a particularly complex position. On one hand, there is the long tradition of Muslim participation in the intellectual and cultural life of Bengal, a tradition that stretches from the medieval period through the colonial encounter and into the modern era. Kazi Nazrul Islam, the rebel poet who is one of the central figures in Kafi's scholarly work, is himself a Muslim intellectual of this tradition: a figure who combined a deep commitment to Bengali cultural life with a religious identity that was irreducibly his own, who refused the communal polarization of the colonial period in the name of a universalist humanism that was at once deeply Bengali and deeply Muslim.

On the other hand, the contemporary political environment has made the position of Muslim intellectuals in India significantly more precarious. The rise of Hindu nationalism, the increasing normalization of anti-Muslim rhetoric in mainstream political discourse, the legal and institutional discrimination against Muslim communities, and the social climate of suspicion and hostility that these developments have created: all of these impose specific psychological burdens on Muslim intellectuals who work in Indian institutions, including universities.

The psychological response to this situation among Muslim intellectuals takes various forms. Some choose to minimize their Muslim identity in public contexts, to present themselves primarily in their professional roles and to avoid engaging with the political dimensions of their religious identity. Others choose a more assertive affirmation of their Muslim identity, insisting on its legitimacy and its compatibility with the deepest values of Indian intellectual and political life. And others, including perhaps Kafi in his own way, navigate this tension by working within a tradition, Marxian secularism, that provides a framework for understanding and analyzing communal ideology without being defined by it.

The Marxian tradition's commitment to the analysis of communalism as a form of false consciousness that diverts attention from the class dimensions of social conflict provides an intellectual framework for understanding the political significance of anti-Muslim ideology without simply reacting to it emotionally. This intellectual framework does not make the psychological burden of living with that ideology any lighter, but it provides the tools for understanding it, for situating it within the broader context of the political economy of contemporary India, and for articulating a response to it that goes beyond mere denunciation.

5.4 The Psychology of the Attacked: Trauma, Resilience, and Intellectual Continuity

The 2019 attack on Abdul Kafi deserves more extended psychological analysis than we have given it in previous chapters. The experience of physical violence, particularly when it is directed at one in one's professional role and emerges from the specific context of one's intellectual and institutional work, is a psychologically significant event that can have lasting consequences for the way in which one understands one's work, one's institution, and one's place in the world.

The psychological literature on trauma suggests that violent attacks produce a range of responses that depend both on the specific character of the trauma and on the psychological resources available to the individual. Acute responses typically include fear, anxiety, and a sense of vulnerability, an awareness that the social world is not as safe as it had appeared. Longer-term responses may include post-traumatic stress symptoms, changes in patterns of thought and behavior designed to reduce the risk of future harm, and in some cases a transformation of one's understanding of one's work and its significance.

In the specific context of an academic attacked by a former student in the context of their professional role, the psychological implications are particularly complex. The relationship between teacher and student is one of considerable trust and intimacy: it involves the sharing of knowledge, the cultivation of intellectual capacities, and often a degree of personal investment in the student's development. When a student, even a former student, becomes the source of violence directed at the teacher, this trust is violated in a way that may have deep psychological consequences. The teacher-student relationship, which had been a source of intellectual meaning and human connection, becomes contaminated by the experience of threat and harm.

At the same time, the psychological response to this kind of trauma can include forms of resilience that draw on the intellectual and institutional resources available to the individual. The support of colleagues, the continuity of intellectual work, the commitment to values that transcend the immediate experience of harm, the sense of belonging to a tradition and a community of scholars that extends beyond one's individual situation: all of these can serve as resources for psychological resilience in the face of trauma. The fact that Kafi has continued his intellectual work and his coordination of the Centre for Marxian Studies in the years since the attack is itself evidence of this kind of resilience.

The psychological analysis of intellectual resilience in the face of trauma connects to broader questions about the relationship between personal experience and intellectual production. The experiences that shape an intellectual's life, including experiences of violence, marginalization, and political pressure, are not merely biographical details irrelevant to the content of their work. They enter into the intellectual work itself, shaping the questions one asks, the texts one attends to, and the urgency one brings to the project of understanding and transforming the world. The tradition of feminist scholarship has particularly emphasized this point, arguing that the personal is political and that the intellectual work of understanding social structures is always grounded in and shaped by personal experience.

5.5 Vocation, Commitment, and the Ethics of Intellectual Work

The psychology of intellectual life includes an ethical dimension that is worth exploring explicitly. The choice to devote one's life to a specific form of intellectual work involves commitments that are not merely professional but ethical: commitments to the pursuit of truth, to the service of justice, to the development of the critical capacities of one's students, and to the broader project of human emancipation that the Marxian tradition articulates.

The ethics of intellectual work has been addressed from several different philosophical perspectives. The Kantian tradition insists on the duty to pursue knowledge for its own sake, regardless of its practical consequences: the commitment to intellectual honesty, to following the argument wherever it leads, and to subjecting one's own conclusions to the same critical scrutiny one applies to others' claims. The consequentialist tradition insists on the duty to ensure that intellectual work serves human welfare: the commitment to working on problems that genuinely matter, to communicating one's findings effectively, and to being honest about the limitations and uncertainties of one's knowledge. The virtue ethics tradition insists on the development of intellectual virtues: the qualities of character, including curiosity, humility, courage, and perseverance, that enable the pursuit of genuine knowledge over a sustained period.

The Marxian tradition adds a specifically political dimension to the ethics of intellectual work: the commitment to the kind of engaged, politically aware scholarship that Gramsci described as the work of the "organic intellectual," an intellectual whose work is genuinely connected to the struggles of the class or group in whose service they work, rather than the "traditional intellectual" whose apparent neutrality conceals a de facto alignment with the interests of the dominant class.

Kafi's intellectual practice, as we have analyzed it throughout this textbook, exemplifies the Gramscian ideal of the organic intellectual adapted to the specific situation of Bengali academic life. His coordination of the Centre for Marxian Studies, his publication in Bengali with a left-wing press, his choice of texts that represent the tradition of politically engaged cultural production: all of these are expressions of an intellectual ethics that refuses the comfortable neutrality of the "pure" scholar in favor of a commitment to the tradition of Marxian critique and the political struggles it serves.

CHAPTER SIX: HISTORICAL ANALYSIS AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY

6.1 History as a Political Problem: The Marxian Approach

The relationship between historical knowledge and political practice is one of the central concerns of Marxian thought, and it has been a persistent theme in the debates of the Centre for Marxian Studies. The Marxian approach to history is not merely descriptive: it is not content to establish what happened in the past. It is also analytical and critical: it aims to understand the structural forces that shaped historical events and the ways in which the past continues to shape the present. And it is practical: it aims to use historical understanding in the service of political transformation.

The Marxian approach to history is grounded in the concept of historical materialism, which we have already introduced in the context of philosophical foundations. But the methodological implications of historical materialism for the practice of historical research and writing are worth spelling out more fully, because they are directly relevant to the kind of literary historical scholarship that Kafi practices.

Historical materialism involves, at its core, the insistence that historical events and processes cannot be adequately understood without analysis of the economic structures and class relations that shape them. This does not mean that every historical event is reducible to an economic cause: historical materialism is not a form of economic determinism that predicts historical outcomes on the basis of economic laws. It means, rather, that the analysis of historical events must attend to their economic context and their relationship to the structures of production and class that determine the material conditions of historical actors.

Applied to the analysis of literary and cultural history, historical materialism insists on understanding texts not as autonomous aesthetic objects but as interventions in specific historical situations, shaped by the economic and class conditions of their production and reception. This is the approach that Kafi employs in his analysis of Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol: situating these texts in their specific historical context, analyzing their relationship to the economic and political conditions of colonial Bengal in the 1920s, and understanding their formal choices as responses to those conditions.

6.2 The Bengali Renaissance and Its Contradictions

The Bengali Renaissance of the nineteenth century is the historical phenomenon that most directly shapes the intellectual tradition within which Kafi works, and it is a phenomenon that requires careful historical analysis. The term "Bengal Renaissance" was introduced by the nationalist historians to describe the intellectual and cultural ferment that characterized Bengal in the nineteenth century, a period of profound transformation associated with figures like Rammohan Roy, Debendranath Tagore, Keshab Chandra Sen, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, and Rabindranath Tagore.

The standard nationalist account of the Bengal Renaissance presents it as a heroic story of intellectual liberation: an indigenous movement of reform and modernization that combined the best of Western liberal thought with the deepest resources of the Indian tradition to produce a new, confident, modern Indian identity. In this account, the Renaissance represents an Indian achievement, a demonstration of the capacity of Indian civilization for self-renewal and modernization.

Marxian historical analysis has subjected this account to searching criticism, most powerfully in the work of Sumit Sarkar. Sarkar's analysis of the Bengal Renaissance emphasizes its class character: the Renaissance was, primarily, the cultural project of the *bhadralok*, the educated upper-caste Hindu middle class that had emerged in colonial Calcutta as a product of the colonial economy and the colonial educational system. The *bhadralok*'s encounter with Western liberalism and modern education produced a distinctive cultural synthesis, but this synthesis

expressed the specific interests and sensibilities of a particular class in a particular historical situation, not the universal aspirations of "Indian civilization."

The contradictions of the Renaissance are evident in the work of its central figures. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, for example, combined the advocacy of rational social reform with an increasingly strident Hindu nationalism that drew on the fear of Muslim domination. Rabindranath Tagore's universalist humanism coexisted with an elite aestheticism that was often indifferent to the conditions of the rural poor. And the Renaissance's emphasis on individual self-development and cultural cultivation was combined with a class-based refusal to engage seriously with the material conditions of the peasants, workers, and urban poor who constituted the vast majority of Bengal's population.

Understanding these contradictions is essential for understanding the significance of the movements and texts that emerged in the 1920s as a challenge to the Renaissance tradition. Nazrul Islam's rebel poetry, with its explicit identification with the Muslim poor and its refusal of the *bhadralok* cultural synthesis, represents a direct challenge to the class and communal limitations of the Renaissance. The communist press represented by *Langol* represents a challenge to the political limitations of the Renaissance's nationalism, insisting that genuine liberation requires social transformation, not merely cultural reform and national independence. And Tagore's own late work, including *Raktakarobi*, represents a self-critique of the Renaissance tradition's accommodation to industrial capitalism.

6.3 Partition, Memory, and the Literature of Loss

The partition of Bengal in 1947, and the subsequent partition of 1971 that created Bangladesh, represent the most traumatic events in modern Bengali history. They are events whose consequences continue to shape Bengali culture, society, and politics in profound ways, and they are events that Bengali literary scholarship cannot address adequately without a serious engagement with the politics of memory.

The literature of partition, as a genre, has received significant scholarly attention in recent decades, both in the specific context of Bengali partition literature and in the comparative context of partition literature across the subcontinent. The emergence of partition studies as a significant subfield within South Asian literary studies reflects the recognition that the experience of partition, with its massive displacement, communal violence, and destruction of communities, is not merely a historical event to be described but a continuing cultural trauma that demands sustained literary and critical attention.

From a Marxian perspective, partition was not merely a communal catastrophe but also an economic and political event whose causes and consequences are inseparable from the political economy of colonialism and the class interests that drove it. The British decision to partition India along communal lines in 1947 was shaped by a complex of considerations that included the desire to prevent the emergence of a unified, socialist-leaning India, the political calculations of the Congress and Muslim League leaderships, and the failure of the Indian left to provide a serious alternative to communal politics as the framework for understanding the crisis of colonial rule.

The political-economic analysis of partition does not diminish the reality of the communal violence and human suffering that accompanied it. It does, however, provide a framework for understanding that violence not as an expression of primordial communal hatreds, which is the dominant mainstream account, but as a product of specific historical conditions that could have been otherwise and that the left's political failure contributed to. This understanding has political implications: it suggests that the communal polarization of the present is also not inevitable, that it has specific historical causes and can be overcome through the kind of political and cultural work that the Centre for Marxian Studies represents.

6.4 The History of the Left in Bengal: Achievements and Failures

The history of the communist movement in Bengal is central to understanding the intellectual tradition within which Kafi works and the specific challenges that tradition currently faces. The Left Front government in West Bengal, which was in power from 1977 to 2011, represents the longest continuously ruling elected communist government in the world. Its achievements and its failures are both significant for understanding the prospects of Marxian politics in the current moment.

The Left Front's achievements were real and significant. The land reforms associated with Operation Barga and the distribution of ceiling-surplus land substantially improved the conditions of large sections of the rural poor. The decentralization of power to elected panchayat bodies in rural areas represented a genuine extension of political participation to previously marginalized communities. The protection of trade union rights and the expansion of labor legislation improved the conditions of industrial workers in Kolkata and other urban centers. And the sustained investment in public education and health services represented a commitment to universal social provision that contrasted favorably with the market-oriented approach of many other state governments.

The failures, however, were equally significant. The Left Front's accommodation to neoliberal economic policy from the 1990s onward, most dramatically expressed in the disastrous Singur and Nandigram land acquisition controversies of 2006-2007, represented an abandonment of its core commitment to the protection of peasant and worker rights in the face of the power of domestic and international capital. The bureaucratization and corruption of the party apparatus, the replacement of genuine political engagement with a system of patronage and control, the progressive alienation of the urban middle class and the rural poor from the Left Front's political project: all of these contributed to the electoral defeat of 2011 and the subsequent collapse of the left's political presence in West Bengal.

The political consequences of this collapse for the intellectual tradition represented by the Centre for Marxian Studies have been significant. The institutional support that the Left Front government had provided for Marxian cultural and intellectual life in West Bengal, through funding for left-wing publishing houses, cultural organizations, and educational institutions, has been significantly reduced. The political climate has shifted in ways that make the kind of engaged, politically committed intellectual work represented by the Centre more difficult to sustain. And the intellectual challenge of understanding what went wrong with the Bengali left,

and what resources remain for a renewed Marxian politics in the current conjuncture, has become one of the most urgent questions facing scholars like Kafi.

6.5 History and the Present: The 2024-2025 Conjuncture

Writing in 2024 and 2025, the historical conjuncture within which the Centre for Marxian Studies operates is characterized by a convergence of several major political and intellectual challenges. The consolidation of the BJP's power at the national level, the ongoing assault on academic freedom and the autonomy of educational institutions, the intensification of communal polarization, the economic consequences of a decade of neoliberal policy including growing inequality and agrarian distress: all of these provide the specific political context within which the Centre's work must situate itself.

At the same time, the intellectual landscape has been enriched by significant new developments. The renewed global interest in socialist ideas, driven by the manifest failures of neoliberalism demonstrated in the 2008 financial crisis and its aftermath, has created new audiences for Marxian analysis and new intellectual conversations about the alternatives to capitalism. The development of new theoretical tools for analyzing the relationship between capitalism, ecology, and the climate crisis has opened up new areas of Marxian scholarship. The growing engagement between Marxism and the politics of caste, gender, and postcolonial identity has produced new theoretical syntheses that go beyond the limitations of both classical Marxism and identity politics.

The specific challenges of the 2024-2025 conjuncture in Bengal include the political dominance of the Trinamool Congress, whose relationship to the left is complex and contested, and the growing influence of the BJP in the state, whose cultural nationalist program is directly hostile to the intellectual tradition that the Centre represents. These political challenges provide the immediate context within which the Centre's intellectual work takes place, and they shape the questions that its seminars and discussions address.

CHAPTER SEVEN: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: BENGALI MARXISM IN GLOBAL CONTEXT

7.1 The Methodology of Comparison

Comparative analysis is one of the most powerful tools available to intellectual historians and cultural critics, and it is a method that has been central to the work of the Centre for Marxian Studies throughout its history. The comparison of the Bengali intellectual tradition with other Marxian intellectual traditions around the world, and the comparison of specific Bengali texts and thinkers with their counterparts in other literary and intellectual cultures, produces insights that are not available from within any single national tradition.

The methodology of comparison, however, is not without its complexities. Comparisons can be misleading if they abstract individual texts or thinkers from their specific historical and cultural

contexts, comparing what appears superficially similar without attending to the deep differences that context makes. The danger of what Edward Said called "comparing imperialisms," the selective comparison that elevates the Western tradition as the norm against which others are measured, is ever present in cross-cultural comparison, and it requires explicit critical awareness.

A genuinely Marxian comparative methodology must attend to both the specificities of context, the ways in which specific historical, economic, and political conditions shape the development of intellectual traditions, and the commonalities of structure, the ways in which similar social forces produce similar intellectual responses across different national and cultural contexts. The comparison of the Bengali Marxian tradition with other Marxian traditions in the global South is particularly productive precisely because it illuminates both the commonalities, the shared structural responses to colonialism, capitalism, and political struggle, and the specificities, the distinctive cultural and historical forms these responses take in different contexts.

7.2 Bengali Marxism and Latin American Critical Theory

The comparison of Bengali Marxian scholarship with the tradition of Latin American critical theory, particularly with the dependency theory tradition associated with figures like Andre Gunder Frank, Raul Prebisch, Celso Furtado, and the liberation theology tradition associated with figures like Paulo Freire and Gustavo Gutierrez, reveals significant structural parallels.

Both traditions emerged in the context of colonial and neocolonial economies whose underdevelopment was a product of their integration into the global capitalist system on terms determined by the metropolitan centers of capital accumulation. Both traditions developed analyses of underdevelopment that challenged the dominant liberal development economics by insisting on the structural character of global inequality. Both traditions combined political-economic analysis with cultural criticism, understanding the cultural dimensions of domination and the cultural resources for resistance as inseparable from the political-economic analysis of exploitation.

The parallel between the Bengali tradition of engaged literary and cultural criticism and Paulo Freire's "pedagogy of the oppressed" is particularly illuminating. Freire, whose work was shaped by his experience of adult literacy programs in northeast Brazil and whose major work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), is one of the most influential texts in the history of critical education theory, argued that genuine education is not the "banking" of information from teacher to student but a process of collective inquiry in which the oppressed become the subjects of their own learning, developing the critical consciousness (*conscientizacao*) that enables them to understand and transform their own situation.

The parallel with the tradition of Bengali political journalism represented by Dhumketu, and with the tradition of political poetry represented by Langol, is clear: both are practices of cultural communication designed not merely to transmit information but to develop the critical consciousness of their audiences, to help peasants and workers understand their own situation as a product of specific historical forces rather than of natural necessity, and thereby to mobilize them for political action. The theoretical framework that Kafi brings to the analysis of these texts

is, in important respects, a Bengali equivalent of the Freirean framework, adapted to the specific cultural and historical context of Bengal.

7.3 Bengali Marxism and African Socialism: Nkrumah, Cabral, and the Cultural Politics of Liberation

The comparison with the African socialist tradition, particularly with the work of Kwame Nkrumah, Amilcar Cabral, and Frantz Fanon, reveals another set of structural parallels that illuminate the Bengali tradition from a different angle.

Amilcar Cabral, the Guinean independence leader and theorist who is one of the most profound thinkers of the African liberation tradition, made a contribution to Marxian political theory that is directly relevant to the questions raised by the Centre for Marxian Studies. Cabral's analysis of "the return to the source" as a moment in the liberation struggle, his insistence that the development of a genuine national culture is an essential component of the struggle for independence and not a luxury to be deferred until after political freedom is achieved, connects directly to the understanding of cultural production that animates the texts of Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol.

For Cabral, the colonial project was not merely economic exploitation but what he called "cultural domination": the systematic suppression of the cultural life of the colonized people and its replacement with the cultural forms of the colonizer. The struggle for liberation therefore required not merely political organization and armed resistance but the recovery and development of the authentic cultural life of the colonized people. This was not a nativist project: Cabral was explicit that the goal was not the restoration of a pre-colonial past but the development of a genuinely national culture that could serve as the basis for a new, post-colonial society.

The parallel with the Bengali tradition is striking. The movements represented by Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol were all, in different ways, engaged in precisely this project: the recovery and development of a Bengali cultural life that could serve as the basis for a post-colonial society, a cultural life that was genuinely Bengali (rather than an imitation of European modernity) while also genuinely modern (rather than a nostalgic recovery of a pre-colonial past). The specific forms this project took, the rebel poetry of Nazrul, the symbolist drama of Tagore, the revolutionary songs of the communist press, reflect the different assessments of the relationship between cultural tradition and political modernity that characterized the different strands of anti-colonial thought in Bengal.

7.4 The Global South as an Intellectual Category: Recent Developments

The concept of the "Global South" as an intellectual and political category has developed significantly in recent years, and the debates about its meaning and its usefulness for intellectual analysis are relevant to the work of the Centre for Marxian Studies and to the comparative methodology we have been developing.

The term "Global South" was initially used primarily as a geographical and economic description, referring to the predominantly non-white, formerly colonized, and economically less developed regions of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. But in recent intellectual discourse, the term has acquired additional significance as a marker of shared intellectual and political perspectives, a common critique of the hegemony of Northern intellectual traditions and the development of alternative analytical frameworks grounded in the specific experiences of colonialism and its aftermath.

Recent scholarship in 2024 and 2025 has pushed beyond simple North-South dichotomies toward a more nuanced understanding of what makes the intellectual traditions of the global South distinctive and valuable. Scholars like Boaventura de Sousa Santos, whose concept of "epistemologies of the South" has been widely influential, argue that the experiences and knowledge-practices of the global South have been systematically suppressed by the dominance of Northern epistemological frameworks, and that recovering and developing these suppressed epistemologies is a necessary component of any genuinely transformative political project.

The Bengali intellectual tradition that Kafi works within can be understood as one of the most significant examples of a "Southern epistemology" in Santos's sense: a body of knowledge and analytical practice that is grounded in the specific historical experience of colonialism and its aftermath, that challenges the hegemony of Northern theoretical frameworks, and that develops distinctive ways of understanding literature, politics, culture, and social transformation that are not simply derivations of European Marxism or liberal theory.

This understanding of the Bengali Marxian tradition as a contribution to the global development of critical theory from the perspective of the global South is, I would argue, one of the most important frames within which to understand the work of the Centre for Marxian Studies and Abdul Kafi's own intellectual contribution. The Centre is not merely applying European Marxian theory to Indian material. It is developing, through its seminars and its scholarship, a distinctively Indian, distinctively Bengali Marxian intellectual tradition that has its own specific insights to contribute to the global conversation about capitalism, colonialism, culture, and transformation.

7.5 Postcolonial Theory: Engagement and Critique

The relationship between Marxian scholarship and postcolonial theory has been one of the most productive and contentious intellectual debates of the past three decades, and it is a debate that the Centre for Marxian Studies has engaged with directly through the participation of scholars like Aijaz Ahmad and Vivek Chibber in its seminars.

Postcolonial theory, associated primarily with Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as a critical framework for understanding the cultural and discursive dimensions of colonialism and its aftermath. Said's analysis of "Orientalism," Bhabha's concepts of "hybridity" and "mimicry," and Spivak's question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" all contributed to a body of theory that has been enormously influential in literary studies, cultural studies, and history.

But postcolonial theory has also been subject to significant Marxian criticism. Aijaz Ahmad's critique, most fully developed in *In Theory* (1992), argued that postcolonial theory's emphasis on discourse, representation, and cultural hybridity tended to displace the analysis of the material conditions of colonialism and its economic consequences. Ahmad argued that postcolonial theory's embrace of poststructuralism led it to replace the analysis of political economy with the analysis of discourse, and that this displacement served the interests of the global bourgeoisie by preventing the development of a genuinely critical analysis of capitalism.

Vivek Chibber's critique, developed in *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (2013), is more recent and in some ways more systematic. Chibber argues that postcolonial theory's claim to have discovered forms of agency and political subjectivity specific to the non-Western world, which cannot be captured by the universal categories of Marxian political economy, rests on a series of theoretical confusions and empirical errors. The specific agents and social forces at work in the colonial and post-colonial world are not fundamentally different from those at work in Western capitalism: they involve the same basic dynamics of capital accumulation, class formation, and political struggle, even if the specific forms these dynamics take are shaped by the specific historical circumstances of each case.

The debate between postcolonial theory and Marxian criticism is not merely academic. It reflects genuine disagreements about how to understand the world and about what kind of intellectual and political work is needed to transform it. The position of the Centre for Marxian Studies in this debate is complex: it takes seriously the critique of Eurocentric theoretical frameworks that postcolonial theory has developed, recognizing that the simple application of European Marxian categories to Indian and Bengali realities is inadequate. But it also insists on the continuing importance of political-economic analysis and the materialist analysis of social structures, refusing the cultural turn's tendency to replace this analysis with the analysis of discourse and representation.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE QUESTION OF LANGUAGE: BENGALI, POLITICS, AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF LINGUISTIC DIFFERENCE

8.1 Language as a Political Problem

The question of language is one of the most fundamental in the intellectual tradition that Abdul Kafi works within, and it deserves extended analysis in its own right. Language is not merely the medium through which thought is expressed: it is the medium through which social reality is constituted, contested, and transformed. The specific language in which intellectual work is conducted, the choice between the vernacular and the metropolitan language, the relationship between the literary language and the spoken vernacular, the politics of translation and the access to global intellectual conversations that translation enables or denies: all of these are questions with profound political and philosophical implications.

The choice to conduct one's primary intellectual work in Bengali, as Kafi does, is not merely a practical or pragmatic choice. It is an ethical and political choice that reflects a specific

understanding of what intellectual work is for, whom it is addressing, and what community it serves. Publishing in Bengali means addressing a readership of tens of millions of Bengali speakers, including both the highly educated and those whose education has been primarily in Bengali rather than in English. It means participating in and contributing to a living intellectual and literary tradition rather than merely referencing that tradition from the outside. And it means refusing the implicit hierarchy that places English-language scholarship above vernacular scholarship in the global academic market.

The philosophy of language has developed sophisticated accounts of the relationship between language and thought, between language and social reality, and between different languages and the different realities they constitute, and these philosophical accounts are directly relevant to the understanding of Kafi's intellectual practice.

8.2 The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis and the Bengali Case

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, or the principle of linguistic relativity, proposes that the structure of a language affects its speakers' worldview and cognitive processes. In its strong form, associated with Benjamin Lee Whorf's analyses of Native American languages, the hypothesis suggests that speakers of different languages inhabit fundamentally different conceptual universes, shaped by the grammatical and lexical structures of their respective languages. In its weaker form, which has more empirical support, the hypothesis suggests that language influences but does not determine thought, that speakers of different languages tend to categorize and attend to the world in somewhat different ways that reflect the specific resources of their language.

The relevance of linguistic relativity to the understanding of Bengali intellectual culture is significant. Bengali has a rich philosophical and literary vocabulary that is not simply translatable into English or other European languages, and this vocabulary reflects a specific history of engagement with the world that English cannot fully capture. The Bengali concept of "bhadrakalok," which we have already used in this text, is an example: it refers to a specific class formation with a specific history in colonial Bengal that is imperfectly captured by any English equivalent. The concept of "nabajagaran" (Renaissance), as applied to the nineteenth-century intellectual movement, carries specific connotations within Bengali cultural discourse that are not fully captured by the English term. And the rich tradition of compound words in Bengali, which combines concepts in ways that create new meanings, reflects a specific way of relating concepts to each other that is not always preservable in translation.

This does not mean that thought in Bengali is simply incommensurable with thought in English or other languages. It means, rather, that genuine intellectual work in Bengali, work that engages with the full resources of the Bengali language and intellectual tradition, produces insights that are not simply accessible from outside that tradition and that contribute something distinctive to the global conversation.

8.3 The National Language Question and the Politics of Bengali

The politics of language in India is a contentious and historically significant dimension of the larger political question of national identity and federal relations. The constitutional settlement of 1950, which recognized Hindi as the official language of the Union while also recognizing a list of "scheduled languages" including Bengali, represents a political compromise that has been continuously contested by speakers of non-Hindi languages.

The attempt to impose Hindi as a common national language, driven primarily by the BJP's cultural nationalism, has generated significant resistance in Bengali-speaking West Bengal and in Tamil Nadu and other non-Hindi-speaking states. The resistance to Hindi imposition connects to a broader question about the relationship between linguistic diversity and national unity: whether genuine Indian unity requires linguistic homogenization, as the Hindi imperialists argue, or whether it is compatible with and even requires the flourishing of linguistic diversity, as the defenders of multilingualism argue.

From a Marxian perspective, the politics of language in India is inseparable from the politics of class and region. The promotion of Hindi as a national language serves the interests of the Hindi-speaking middle and upper classes, who are advantaged in national labor markets and political competition by the dominance of their language. The resistance to Hindi imposition reflects the interests of non-Hindi-speaking communities who face disadvantage when Hindi becomes the dominant language of public life and economic opportunity. The linguistic politics of India is therefore not merely a cultural question but a political-economic question about the distribution of social power and economic opportunity.

The commitment of the Bengali Department at Jadavpur and the Centre for Marxian Studies to conducting their intellectual work primarily in Bengali is, in this context, a political commitment as well as a scholarly one: a refusal of the implicit hierarchy that places Hindi (or English) above Bengali in the national cultural landscape, and an assertion of the vitality and the intellectual importance of the Bengali tradition.

8.4 Translation, Power, and the Circulation of Knowledge

The question of translation is closely related to the politics of language and is equally significant for understanding the situation of Bengali Marxian scholarship in the global intellectual landscape. Translation is not a neutral act of transferring meaning from one language to another: it is a process of selection, interpretation, and transformation that is shaped by the power relations between the languages and cultures involved.

The dominance of English in global academic discourse means that knowledge produced in Bengali is accessible to global audiences primarily through translation, and that the decision about what to translate, how to translate it, and within what interpretive framework to present it, is itself a political act. The relative invisibility of Bengali Marxian scholarship in global academic conversations reflects not merely the preferences of individual translators and publishers but the structural power of the global academic market, which values certain kinds of knowledge (produced in certain languages, addressing certain audiences, according to certain methodological conventions) over others.

The implications of this situation for the reception of Kafi's work are clear. His major published text, the essay collection on Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol, is currently accessible only to readers of Bengali. Its engagement with questions of political culture, literary form, and historical context is, from the perspective of international literary theory, genuinely sophisticated and genuinely significant. But its significance is largely invisible to non-Bengali readers, not because it lacks merit but because the global academic market does not have the mechanisms to make it accessible.

The development of translation projects, digital platforms, and alternative publication channels that can make the work of Bengali Marxian scholars accessible to broader international audiences is therefore not merely a practical matter of intellectual communication. It is a political project of challenging the hegemony of English-language academic discourse and insisting on the intellectual significance of knowledge produced from within the Bengali tradition.

CHAPTER NINE: ECONOMIC ANALYSIS, NEOLIBERALISM, AND THE CRISIS OF CONTEMPORARY INDIA

9.1 The Neoliberal Turn and Its Indian Variant

The analysis of neoliberalism and its consequences for India is one of the central concerns of the current program of the Centre for Marxian Studies, and it is an analysis that connects directly to the political and cultural questions that Kafi's literary scholarship addresses. Understanding neoliberalism, both as a global economic ideology and as a specific set of policies implemented in India since 1991, requires both the tools of Marxian political economy and the kind of historical and cultural analysis that the Centre's interdisciplinary program provides.

Neoliberalism, as an economic doctrine, advocates the reduction of state intervention in the economy, the privatization of public enterprises, the liberalization of trade and capital flows, the deregulation of labor markets, and the reduction of public expenditure on social services. These policies, associated in the global context with the "Washington Consensus" and enforced by international institutions like the IMF and the World Bank, have been implemented in India in a gradual and politically mediated way since the economic crisis of 1991, which provided the political opening for a significant restructuring of the relationship between the state and the market.

The consequences of India's neoliberal turn have been complex and contested. On the one hand, the liberalization of the Indian economy has been associated with significant economic growth, particularly in the service sector and in the urban middle class. The emergence of India as a major player in the global information technology industry, the growth of the Indian consumer market, and the improvement in certain aggregate economic indicators all point to genuine economic development in some sectors and regions.

On the other hand, the distribution of the benefits of this growth has been extremely unequal. The gains from economic liberalization have been heavily concentrated in the urban, educated,

English-speaking middle and upper classes, while large sections of the rural poor, agricultural workers, and informal sector workers have experienced stagnating or declining real incomes, the withdrawal of public services, and the intensification of economic insecurity. The agrarian crisis, marked by the epidemic of farmer suicides that has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives since the 1990s, is the most dramatic symptom of the devastation that neoliberal agricultural policy, including the reduction of agricultural subsidies and the exposure of Indian farmers to international commodity markets, has visited on rural India.

9.2 The Farm Laws Crisis and the Resurgence of Agrarian Politics

The farm laws crisis of 2020-2021, in which the BJP government's attempt to liberalize Indian agricultural markets through three controversial farm laws was met with the largest protest movement in Indian history, provides a striking illustration of the continuing relevance of the agrarian question in Indian political economy and of the political dynamics of neoliberal reform in India.

The three farm laws, which were passed by parliament in September 2020, were presented by the government as measures to liberalize agricultural markets and give farmers the freedom to sell their produce to a wider range of buyers, including private corporations. But the farmers' organizations that led the protest movement, drawing their strength primarily from Punjab and Haryana, argued that the laws would undermine the minimum support price system that provides Indian farmers with a guaranteed price floor for their crops, expose them to the predatory practices of large corporations, and ultimately accelerate the process of agricultural dispossession that neoliberal policy had already initiated.

The movement that emerged in response to these laws was remarkable in several dimensions. Its scale was extraordinary: hundreds of thousands of farmers occupied major highways in the winter of 2020-2021, maintaining their protest over more than a year in the face of cold weather, government pressure, and hostile media coverage. Its organization was sophisticated: the more than 500 farmers' unions that participated in the movement maintained a degree of unity and discipline that was unexpected given the diversity of their memberships. And its politics were instructive: the movement explicitly refused the BJP's attempt to characterize it in communal terms, insisting on its unity across religious and caste lines and framing its demands in explicitly class terms as a defense of the interests of peasant farmers against corporate capital.

The farm laws crisis connects directly to the intellectual tradition represented by the Centre for Marxian Studies in several ways. The agrarian question, the question of the relationship between industrial capital and the peasantry, between the requirements of capital accumulation and the social reproduction of rural communities, has been central to Marxian political economy from the beginning. The texts that Kafi analyzes, particularly Langol with its representation of the revolutionary peasant, are interventions in a tradition of thinking about the agrarian question that stretches from Narayan Gangopadhyay's advocacy journalism through the Tebhaga movement of the 1940s to the land reforms of the Left Front government to the farm laws crisis of 2020-2021.

9.3 Platform Capitalism and the New Frontiers of Exploitation

The emergence of platform capitalism, the specific form of capitalist organization associated with large digital platforms like Amazon, Uber, Ola, Zomato, and Swiggy, represents a new development in the political economy of India that requires both the tools of Marxian political economy and new theoretical concepts to analyze adequately.

Platform capitalism involves the organization of production and distribution through digital platforms that bring together large numbers of workers (drivers, delivery workers, domestic service workers) with large numbers of consumers, using algorithms to manage the labor process and to extract value from the activities of both workers and consumers. The platform companies present themselves not as employers of the workers who use their platforms but as providers of technology that connects independent contractors with customers, a legal fiction that allows them to avoid the labor protections, minimum wages, benefits, and collective bargaining rights that apply to employees in the formal economy.

From a Marxian perspective, this legal fiction is simply a new mechanism for the extraction of surplus value from workers while evading the legal and social obligations that previous generations of workers' struggles have imposed on capital. The "gig economy" workers of the platform companies are, in substantive terms, workers who are subject to algorithmic management, who have little control over their working conditions, and who face all the insecurities of employment without any of its legal protections. The distinction between employee and independent contractor, which serves as the legal basis for the platform companies' evasion of labor law, is a legal fiction that the Marxian analysis of class relations exposes as such.

The growth of platform capitalism in India has been particularly rapid, and its impacts on urban labor markets have been significant. The proliferation of app-based delivery workers, rideshare drivers, and domestic service workers in Indian cities represents both a new form of the "informal economy" that has always been a dominant feature of Indian capitalism and a new mechanism for the extension of market relations into previously non-commodified areas of social life. The analysis of this development, and its implications for the organization of labor, the politics of class, and the possibilities of collective action, is one of the most pressing intellectual tasks facing contemporary Marxian scholarship in India.

9.4 Digital Capitalism and the Transformation of Cultural Production

The transformation of cultural production under conditions of digital capitalism is another area of significant intellectual concern, directly relevant to the questions about literature, culture, and political change that Kafi's work addresses. The digital transformation of publishing, music, film, and other cultural industries has created new opportunities for the production and distribution of cultural work, but it has also created new forms of commodification and new mechanisms of control that require critical analysis.

The economics of digital cultural production is characterized by several distinctive features. The marginal cost of reproducing digital content is effectively zero: once a text, a piece of music, or a film has been created, it can be copied and distributed at no additional cost. This means that the traditional economics of cultural production, in which the publisher or record company invested

in the production of a cultural good and recovered its investment through the sale of copies, is no longer adequate. The dominant model of digital cultural capitalism is instead the extraction of value from user attention and data, through advertising revenues and the monetization of user data, rather than through the sale of cultural goods.

The consequences of this shift for writers, musicians, and other cultural workers have been largely negative. The streaming platforms that dominate digital music and film distribution pay royalties at rates that make it impossible for most artists to earn a living from their work. The social media platforms that dominate digital publishing and commentary extract advertising revenues from user-generated content while paying nothing to the creators of that content. And the algorithmic curation of content on these platforms tends to promote the most commercially successful and emotionally immediate content at the expense of the complex, nuanced, and politically challenging work that constitutes the best of the critical tradition.

The implications of this transformation for the kind of politically engaged literary and cultural work that Kafi's scholarship represents are significant. The tradition of politically committed cultural production that stretches from Dhumketu and Langol through the progressive writers' movement to the present has always depended on the existence of publishing institutions, cultural organizations, and distribution networks that prioritize political and aesthetic values over commercial ones. The National Book Agency, which published Kafi's major work, is one such institution. But the commercial pressures that platform capitalism has intensified threaten these institutions and the cultural practices they support.

CHAPTER TEN: EDUCATION, PEDAGOGY, AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF KNOWLEDGE

10.1 The University as an Intellectual Institution: Theory and Practice

The university, as an intellectual institution, is both a site of knowledge production and a site of social reproduction. Its role in the reproduction of social inequality, through the differential access to education that class, caste, and regional inequalities produce, has been extensively analyzed from a Marxian perspective. But the university is also a site of genuine intellectual work, of the production of knowledge that, at its best, challenges the dominant ideological framework and contributes to the development of critical consciousness.

The tension between these two functions, between the university as a mechanism of social reproduction and the university as a site of critical intellectual work, is the fundamental tension that characterizes academic life in any capitalist society. It is a tension that is intensified in the current period of neoliberal restructuring, which tends to push universities toward the former function (producing workers with the skills required by the market) at the expense of the latter (producing critical thinkers capable of questioning the social order that the market serves).

The question of pedagogy, of how one teaches, is inseparable from the question of what one teaches and why. A pedagogy that presents knowledge as a set of facts to be memorized and

techniques to be mastered reproduces the "banking" concept of education that Freire criticized. A pedagogy that engages students as active participants in the production of knowledge, that develops their critical capacities and their ability to question received assumptions, that connects the knowledge being produced in the classroom to the social and political realities outside it: this is the kind of pedagogy that the tradition of engaged Marxian scholarship represents.

Kafi's own pedagogical practice, as we understand it from the context of his institutional role and his intellectual commitments, is animated by precisely this understanding of what teaching is for. The organization of student-facing cultural events like the Sishu-kishore Utsav, the festival for children and young people that he has been involved in organizing, reflects an understanding that intellectual and cultural development is not confined to the formal space of the classroom but extends into the broader cultural life of the community. The organization of seminars and discussions through the Centre for Marxian Studies reflects an understanding that the university's intellectual life is enriched by dialogue with scholars and intellectuals from outside the academy as well as within it.

10.2 The National Education Policy 2020 and Its Implications

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), which represents the BJP government's most ambitious attempt to restructure Indian higher education, is an important focus of critical analysis for scholars within the Marxian tradition. The NEP 2020 introduces significant changes to the structure of Indian higher education, including the transition to a four-year undergraduate degree, the introduction of a credit system and multiple entry and exit points, the emphasis on vocational and skill-based education, and the increased autonomy of institutions to raise funds from private sources.

From a Marxian perspective, the NEP 2020 is best understood as a neoliberal restructuring of Indian higher education designed to bring it into alignment with the requirements of a market economy and to reduce the state's financial obligations to the public higher education system. The emphasis on skill-based education and employability reflects the prioritization of the needs of industry over the broader goals of education, including the development of critical thinking, civic engagement, and the capacity for autonomous intellectual judgment. The increased autonomy to raise private funds is likely to accelerate the commercialization of higher education and to increase the barriers to access for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The implications for institutions like Jadavpur University and for departments and centers like the Centre for Marxian Studies are significant. The NEP's framework of rankings, autonomy, and market-linked funding creates incentives for universities to prioritize commercially relevant research and to reduce their support for humanities and social science disciplines that do not generate external funding. The kind of politically engaged, interdisciplinary, humanistically oriented scholarship represented by the Centre for Marxian Studies is precisely the kind of scholarship that is least well-served by the market-oriented framework of the NEP 2020.

10.3 Student Politics, Academic Freedom, and the Crisis of the Indian University

The crisis of the Indian university in the current period is not merely economic or institutional. It is also political, in the sense that the autonomy of universities to pursue genuine intellectual inquiry has been directly threatened by the political interference of the BJP government and its affiliated organizations in university governance, curricula, and campus politics.

The pattern of political interference in Indian universities under the current regime includes several dimensions. The appointment of politically sympathetic vice-chancellors and administrators, often in violation of established academic conventions; the manipulation of university governing bodies to exclude faculty with left or liberal political orientations; the use of campus BJP student organizations to intimidate student activists, journalists, and faculty who criticize government policies; the invocation of sedition and anti-terror laws against student activists; and the use of regulatory mechanisms to suppress academic freedom in specific institutions: all of these represent a systematic assault on the academic culture of critical inquiry that institutions like Jadavpur University have historically embodied.

Jadavpur University has been at the center of some of the most significant episodes in this political battle over academic freedom. The university's strong tradition of student activism and its political culture of resistance to authority have made it both a target for the political right and a site of significant resistance. The student movement at Jadavpur has a long history of engagement with political questions, from the anti-Emergency protests of the 1970s to the current resistance to the political pressures of the BJP era, and this history is part of what gives the university its distinctive intellectual character.

The crisis of academic freedom in the current period also has a specifically gendered dimension. The normalization of sexual harassment and the inadequacy of institutional mechanisms for addressing it have been a significant issue in Indian universities, including Jadavpur. The POSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment) Act of 2013 created a legal framework for addressing sexual harassment in the workplace, including universities, but its implementation has been uneven and has often favored the protection of institutional reputation over the protection of individual complainants. The political dimension of gender in the university context is inseparable from the broader political dynamics of the BJP era, in which the reassertion of patriarchal values and the rollback of women's rights are significant components of the cultural nationalist project.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE AESTHETICS OF RESISTANCE: ART, LITERATURE, AND POLITICAL CHANGE IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

11.1 The Question of Political Art

The relationship between aesthetic experience and political change is one of the oldest and most contested questions in the philosophy of art, and it is a question that runs through all of Abdul Kafi's intellectual work. Can art change the world? Does the production of politically committed art contribute to political transformation, or does the aesthetic mediation of political content dissipate its transformative force? What is the relationship between the formal qualities of a work of art and its political effects? These questions are not merely theoretical. They have practical

implications for the kind of cultural work that scholars and cultural practitioners in the tradition of Bengali Marxian thought need to engage in.

The tradition of thinking about these questions within the Marxian framework is rich and diverse. We have already encountered the debate between Lukacs and Brecht about realism and modernism, the Frankfurt School's analysis of the culture industry, and Benjamin's reflections on the political potentials and dangers of the mechanical reproduction of art. Each of these traditions offers insights of continuing relevance, but none of them provides a definitive answer to the question of what makes art politically effective.

What we can say with some confidence, drawing on both theoretical reflection and historical evidence, is that the relationship between art and political change is neither direct nor simple. Art does not produce political change in the way that organizing, legislation, or economic pressure produce political change. But it contributes to the conditions under which political change becomes possible by shaping the imaginative landscape within which political subjects understand their world and their possibilities. Art that reveals the historically contingent character of social arrangements that seem natural and inevitable, that makes visible the suffering and the aspiration that dominant ideology renders invisible, that opens up the imaginative space for envisioning a different social order: this kind of art contributes to the development of the critical consciousness that political transformation requires.

11.2 Contemporary Bengali Literature and Its Political Dimensions

Contemporary Bengali literature, both in West Bengal and in Bangladesh, is a rich and diverse field that continues to engage with the political questions that have defined the Bengali literary tradition since the nineteenth century. The analysis of this contemporary literary production from a Marxian perspective is one of the tasks that the tradition of scholarship represented by Kafi's work must address.

Several themes in contemporary Bengali literary production are particularly significant from the perspective of Marxian literary criticism. The representation of the agrarian crisis, including farmer suicides, land dispossession, and the transformation of rural social relations under the pressure of capitalist development, has generated a significant body of fiction and poetry that engages with the human consequences of the political-economic changes we have analyzed in this chapter. The representation of urban poverty, informal labor, and the lived experience of economic insecurity in the cities of Bengal provides a literature of witness to the social consequences of neoliberal restructuring. The literature of partition and its aftermath continues to be a significant strand in Bengali literary production, as writers engage with the continuing consequences of 1947 and 1971 for the communities they have transformed.

The literature of communal conflict and its aftermath, including the representation of anti-Muslim violence and the psychological dimensions of living with communal polarization, has also become an increasingly urgent dimension of contemporary Bengali literary production. The BJP's consolidation of power in West Bengal has intensified the communal tensions that have long been a feature of the state's politics, and the literary response to these tensions is an important dimension of the cultural politics of the present moment.

11.3 Cinema, Television, and the Cultural Politics of the Digital Age

Bengali cinema has a distinguished tradition of politically engaged filmmaking, associated above all with Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak, but also including a long tradition of "parallel cinema" and more recently of "new wave" filmmaking that has engaged with the social and political realities of contemporary Bengal. The analysis of contemporary Bengali cinema from a Marxian perspective is another important task for the tradition of cultural criticism that Kafi's work exemplifies.

Ritwik Ghatak, whose films including *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, *Komal Gandhar*, and *Subarnarekha* represent some of the most powerful explorations of partition and its consequences in world cinema, provides a model of politically engaged filmmaking that is directly relevant to the current moment. Ghatak's films do not merely represent partition as a historical event. They explore the psychological and cultural dimensions of displacement and loss, using formal experimentation and a deeply humanistic sensibility to create works that are simultaneously political and aesthetic achievements.

The challenge of maintaining this tradition of politically engaged, aesthetically ambitious filmmaking in the context of the contemporary digital media landscape is significant. The dominance of OTT platforms and the commercial pressures they impose tend to favor the production of content that is commercially successful rather than politically challenging. The challenge for Bengali filmmakers and cultural producers who work in the tradition of Ghatak and Ray is to find ways of engaging with contemporary political realities through new forms and new distribution channels while maintaining the aesthetic and political commitments that define the tradition.

CHAPTER TWELVE: FUTURE DIRECTIONS: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

12.1 The Intellectual Agenda for the Next Decade

The final chapter of this Part turns from the analysis of existing intellectual traditions and contemporary challenges to a reflection on the intellectual agenda for the Centre for Marxian Studies and for the tradition of Bengali Marxian scholarship more broadly in the coming decade. This is necessarily a speculative and forward-looking exercise, but it is also a necessary one, because intellectual traditions that are genuinely alive are not merely custodians of a received heritage but are actively engaged in the development of new analytical tools and new responses to new challenges.

Several intellectual tasks seem particularly pressing for the next decade of work in the tradition that Kafi represents. The first is the development of a more adequate theory of the relationship between capitalism and ecology, one that goes beyond the general analysis of "metabolic rift" to provide specific accounts of how capitalist development is transforming the specific ecosystems and natural resources of Bengal and India. The Sundarban mangrove delta, one of the most ecologically significant ecosystems in the world and a defining feature of the natural geography

of Bengal, faces threats from both sea-level rise driven by global warming and from the pressures of agricultural expansion and industrial development. The analysis of these threats, and of the political and economic forces that drive them, requires the combination of ecological science with Marxian political economy that the Centre is well-placed to develop.

The second intellectual task is the development of a more sophisticated engagement with the question of caste and its relationship to class in the specific context of West Bengal and India. The relative neglect of caste in the Bengali left tradition, compared with the more sustained engagement with caste in other regional Marxian traditions, is both an intellectual and a political limitation. The development of a Marxian analysis of caste that is adequate to the complexity of its relationship with class, without reducing caste to a mere epiphenomenon of class, is an urgent intellectual task.

The third is the engagement with the political economy of new technologies, including artificial intelligence and digital automation, and their implications for labor, inequality, and political organization in India. The displacement of workers by automation, the concentration of the economic gains from artificial intelligence in the hands of a small number of technology corporations, and the use of surveillance technology by the state and by corporations to monitor and control workers and citizens: all of these developments raise new and urgent questions for Marxian political economy.

The fourth is the sustained engagement with the feminist critique of Marxism and the development of a genuinely feminist Marxism that is adequate to the specific forms of gender oppression in the Indian and Bengali context. The relationship between the subordination of women and the functioning of capitalist social reproduction has been analyzed in the Marxian tradition from a variety of perspectives, but the specific forms of this relationship in the Indian context, including the intersection of gender with caste, class, and religious community, require analysis that is grounded in the specific historical and cultural realities of this context.

12.2 The Digital Transformation of Scholarship

The digital transformation of scholarly communication, including the growth of online journals, preprint servers, social media platforms, and digital archives, is creating new opportunities and new challenges for the tradition of Marxian scholarship represented by the Centre for Marxian Studies.

The opportunities are significant. Digital platforms make it possible to reach audiences that were previously inaccessible, both within India and internationally. The digitization of historical archives, including collections of periodicals like *Dhumketu* and *Langol*, makes it possible to study these texts in ways that were previously limited by the availability of physical copies. Online seminars and virtual conferences make it possible to sustain intellectual conversations across geographical distances in ways that were not previously feasible.

The challenges are equally significant. The dominance of English in international digital scholarly communication creates new pressures on scholars who work in vernacular languages, including Bengali. The proliferation of content on social media platforms tends to reward brevity

and emotional immediacy over the depth and nuance that serious intellectual work requires. And the commercial incentives of digital platforms tend to favor viral content over the sustained engagement with complex ideas that scholarly communication demands.

The development of digital platforms and archives that can serve the needs of Bengali Marxian scholarship specifically, making Bengali scholarly work accessible to wider audiences while maintaining the quality and depth that the tradition demands, is an important practical task for the coming decade. This includes both the development of Bengali-language platforms for scholarly communication and the development of translation projects that can make Bengali scholarly work accessible to international readers.

12.3 The Next Generation of Bengali Marxian Scholars

The intellectual future of the tradition that Abdul Kafi represents depends ultimately on the development of the next generation of Bengali Marxian scholars, the students who are currently being trained in the Department of Bengali and the Centre for Marxian Studies at Jadavpur and in related institutions, and who will carry the tradition forward in the coming decades.

The formation of the next generation of scholars in this tradition requires both the transmission of the existing intellectual heritage, the theoretical frameworks, the historical knowledge, the methodological tools, and the engagement with new intellectual challenges and new political realities that the tradition has not previously had to address. It requires both the deep engagement with Bengali literary and intellectual history that the tradition has always demanded and the openness to new theoretical developments, in Marxian economics, in critical theory, in postcolonial studies, in feminist theory, and in the emerging fields of digital humanities and ecological scholarship, that the current intellectual landscape requires.

The challenge of sustaining this tradition in the face of the political and institutional pressures we have analyzed throughout this Part is not to be underestimated. The defunding of public higher education, the political interference in university governance, the growing dominance of market logic in academic evaluation: all of these create conditions that are hostile to the kind of deep, politically engaged, long-term intellectual work that the tradition represents. The resilience of the tradition depends on the political and institutional commitment of those who work within it to defend the conditions that make it possible, as well as on the purely intellectual commitment to the work itself.

12.4 Closing Reflections: What Kafi Represents

In the final analysis, Abdul Kafi represents something that is both specific and general: specific in that he is a particular individual working in a specific institution in a specific intellectual tradition in a specific historical moment, and general in that what he represents is a way of understanding the relationship between intellectual work and political struggle that has implications far beyond his particular situation.

What he represents is the conviction that the study of literature, history, and culture is not a retreat from political engagement but a form of political engagement: that understanding the

cultural dimensions of power and resistance is essential for any serious project of political transformation, and that the tradition of Marxian cultural criticism provides the most powerful tools currently available for this understanding.

What he represents is the commitment to working in a specific language and a specific cultural tradition, taking that tradition seriously as a source of intellectual resources rather than treating it as merely a regional variant of a universal theory developed elsewhere: the conviction that genuine knowledge is always rooted in specific historical and cultural experiences, and that the Bengali experience has specific insights to contribute to the global conversation about capitalism, culture, and human emancipation.

What he represents is the institutional commitment to building and sustaining the intellectual community, the seminars, the journals, the cultural events, the networks of scholarly connection, through which a living intellectual tradition reproduces itself: the understanding that intellectual work is never merely individual but is always collective, embedded in institutions and communities that provide the conditions for its possibility.

And what he represents is the personal courage to continue this work in the face of political adversity, institutional pressure, and personal risk, the courage that was demonstrated in the 2019 attack and its aftermath, and that is demonstrated daily in the choice to continue pursuing the kind of politically engaged, critically ambitious intellectual work that the dominant academic market devalues and that the dominant political forces would prefer to silence.

These are qualities that the best intellectual traditions have always required of those who work within them. They are qualities that Abdul Kafi exemplifies in his own specific way, and that the tradition he represents, the tradition of Bengali Marxian scholarship at Jadavpur University, continues to sustain and to develop.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS TO PART THREE: THE ARCHITECTURE OF CRITICAL THOUGHT

The title of this Part promised an examination of "the architecture of critical thought" as it is embodied in the work of the Centre for Marxian Studies and in the intellectual practice of Abdul Kafi. Having traced this architecture across twelve chapters spanning political economy, legal philosophy, psychology, comparative analysis, cultural theory, and pedagogical reflection, we are now in a position to identify its most fundamental features.

The first fundamental feature is what we might call the principle of totality: the insistence that no aspect of social reality can be adequately understood in isolation from its connections to the whole. Literature cannot be understood apart from its political and economic context. Law cannot be understood apart from the class relations it reflects and serves. Psychology cannot be understood apart from the social structures that shape the individual. This principle of totality is Hegelian in its origin but Marxian in its application: it insists not on the logical totality of Hegel's idealist system but on the concrete totality of specific social formations, understood as structured

wholes in which economic, political, cultural, and psychological dimensions are systematically connected.

The second fundamental feature is the principle of historicity: the insistence that all social phenomena are historically specific, that what appears natural and eternal is in fact contingent and transformable, and that understanding the historical conditions that gave rise to the present is essential for understanding the possibilities of the future. This principle is why Kafi's analysis of the three texts of the 1920s is not antiquarianism but living scholarship: the historical past it illuminates is the history through which the present has been constituted, and understanding it is understanding the conditions within which we currently act.

The third fundamental feature is what we might call the principle of committed engagement: the refusal of the fiction of scholarly neutrality in favor of an explicitly committed intellectual practice that acknowledges its own political positioning and that is oriented toward the project of human emancipation. This does not mean that the quality of evidence and argument is sacrificed to political commitment: the commitment to truth is itself a political commitment in a world where power systematically distorts knowledge in its own service. It means that the choice of what questions to ask, what texts to read, what frameworks to apply, is always already a political choice, and that making this choice consciously and deliberately, in the service of an explicit political project, is more intellectually honest than pretending that it is not a choice at all.

The fourth fundamental feature is what we might call the principle of dialogue: the insistence that intellectual work is always collective, always embedded in conversations with interlocutors within and across intellectual traditions, and that the richest knowledge is produced in the encounter between different perspectives, different disciplines, and different historical experiences. The Centre for Marxian Studies, as an institution that brings together scholars from different disciplines, different countries, and different intellectual traditions, is the institutional expression of this commitment to dialogue.

These four principles together constitute the architecture of critical thought that Abdul Kafi's work exemplifies and that the Centre for Marxian Studies embodies. They are principles that have been developed across the long history of the Marxian tradition and that have been adapted and elaborated in the specific context of Bengali and Indian intellectual life. And they are principles that remain urgently relevant in the current moment, when the need for exactly this kind of critical, engaged, historically informed, and politically committed intellectual work is greater than it has been at any point in recent memory.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

1. How does the founding of the Centre for Marxian Studies in 1995, in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet collapse, reflect a specific understanding of Marxism's relationship to actually existing socialism? What does this understanding suggest about the appropriate response to the current crisis of socialist politics?

2. Compare the Gramscian concept of "hegemony" with the Althusserian concept of "Ideological State Apparatuses" as frameworks for analyzing the relationship between cultural institutions, including universities and literary presses, and class power. Which framework is more useful for analyzing the specific situation of the Centre for Marxian Studies?
3. Analyze the concept of "drain of wealth" as developed by Naoroji and Utsa Patnaik in relation to the contemporary analysis of "capital flight" and the extraction of profits from developing countries by multinational corporations. What are the continuities and differences between colonial and contemporary forms of economic extraction?
4. Evaluate Pashukanis's "commodity form theory of law" as a framework for understanding the colonial legal system and its consequences for India. What are the strengths and limitations of this framework for understanding contemporary legal developments in India?
5. How does the analysis of the political economy of platform capitalism relate to the historical analysis of informal labor in India? What continuities and discontinuities are there between the old forms of informal work and the new forms associated with app-based platforms?
6. Analyze the NEP 2020 from a Marxian perspective, drawing on the concepts developed in Chapter Ten. What specific mechanisms does the NEP use to align higher education with the requirements of market capitalism, and what resources are available within the university system to resist these mechanisms?
7. Compare the Marxian analysis of communalism in India with the analysis of communalism and sectarianism in other post-colonial contexts, for example in Nigeria, Lebanon, or Sri Lanka. What do the structural similarities tell us about the relationship between communal ideology and capitalist development?
8. Assess the claim that Bengali Marxian scholarship constitutes a distinctive "epistemology of the South" in Santos's sense. What specific insights does the Bengali tradition offer that are not available from within Northern Marxian theoretical frameworks?
9. How does the analysis of the farm laws crisis of 2020-2021 illuminate the contemporary agrarian question in India? What does the movement against the farm laws suggest about the political possibilities available to the rural poor in the current conjuncture?
10. Analyze the psychological dimensions of intellectual vocation in the tradition of committed Marxian scholarship, drawing on the frameworks developed in Chapter Five. What personal qualities does this kind of intellectual practice require, and what institutional conditions does it depend on?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

On the history and theory of the Centre for Marxian Studies and its intellectual context: the official website of the Centre provides information about its history, program, and participants. Sumit Sarkar's *Modern India 1885-1947* provides the essential historical context for understanding the intellectual tradition. Partha Chatterjee's *The Nation and Its Fragments* offers a sophisticated postcolonial perspective on Indian nationalist thought.

On Gramscian theory and its applications: Antonio Gramsci's Prison Notebooks, available in English translation in various editions, is the essential primary source. Stuart Hall's Selected Writings, particularly the essays collected in Cultural Studies 1983, provide an accessible introduction to the Gramscian tradition. Chantal Mouffe's edited volume Gramsci and Marxist Theory provides a range of perspectives on Gramsci's significance.

On Marxian political economy and Indian development: Utsa Patnaik and Sam Moyo, The Agrarian Question in the Neoliberal Era (2011), provides an essential analysis of the agrarian question from a Marxian perspective. Prabhat Patnaik's The Value of Money and The Retreat to Unfreedom address key questions in contemporary Marxian economics. Amiya Kumar Bagchi's Perilous Passage provides a historical overview of the global ascendancy of capital.

On Marxian legal theory: Evgeny Pashukanis's General Theory of Law and Marxism, available in English translation, is the essential primary source for the commodity form theory of law. China Mieville's Between Equal Rights: A Marxist Theory of International Law extends Pashukanis's analysis to international law. B.R. Ambedkar's Annihilation of Caste provides the essential perspective on caste and law from the tradition of Dalit thought.

On comparative postcolonial intellectual traditions: Amilcar Cabral's Return to the Source, available in English translation, provides an essential perspective from the African liberation tradition. Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed remains a classic of radical pedagogical theory. Boaventura de Sousa Santos's Epistemologies of the South offers a systematic argument for the value of Southern intellectual traditions.

On contemporary Marxian theory: Moishe Postone's Time, Labor, and Social Domination provides the most sophisticated contemporary rereading of Marx's Capital. Jason Moore's Capitalism in the Web of Life develops the Marxian analysis of ecology and capitalism. Tithi Bhattacharya's edited volume Social Reproduction Theory provides an essential feminist Marxist perspective.

On Bengali culture and its political dimensions: the essays of Supriya Chaudhuri on Bengali literary and cultural history, available in various journals and collections, provide essential scholarly guidance. The work of Partha Dutta on contemporary Bengali cinema offers a politically informed perspective on the cinematic tradition. The journals Bichitra and Parichay, available in the archives of several major libraries, provide access to the Bengali-language debates in literary and cultural criticism.

End of Part Three

This textbook continues with Part Four: The Philosophy of Language, the Politics of Translation, and the Archive of Bengali Thought.

APPENDIX TO PART THREE: KEY CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL GLOSSARY

The following is a brief glossary of key theoretical concepts introduced or developed in Part Three, provided for the convenience of students approaching this material for the first time. Each concept is defined briefly and its significance for the analysis developed in this Part is indicated.

Accumulation on a World Scale (Samir Amin): The argument that capitalist development operates at the scale of the world economy as a whole, with the mechanisms of "unequal exchange" systematically transferring value from the peripheral countries of the global South to the center countries of the global North. This analysis provides a framework for understanding the structural causes of underdevelopment in countries like India.

Commodity Form Theory of Law (Pashukanis): The argument that the specific form of modern law, as a system of abstract, formal rules that treat all subjects as formally equal bearers of rights, is a historically specific product of the commodity form of capitalist production. This analysis challenges the liberal claim that modern law represents a universal achievement of civilizational progress, revealing it instead as a historically specific form of social organization suited to the requirements of capitalist exchange.

Conscientizacao (Freire): The development of critical consciousness through which oppressed people come to understand their situation not as natural or inevitable but as the product of specific historical and social conditions that can be transformed. Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed aims at the development of conscientizacao through a process of dialogue in which the oppressed become the subjects rather than the objects of the educational process.

Counter-hegemony (Gramsci): The development of alternative cultural and intellectual frameworks that challenge the dominant ideology and prepare the conditions for political transformation. Counter-hegemonic work includes both theoretical critique and the development of alternative cultural institutions, organizations, and practices that can sustain and develop oppositional consciousness.

Dialectical Image (Benjamin): A concept developed by Walter Benjamin to describe the way in which historical moments of significance are preserved in cultural forms and can be recovered and reactivated in the present. The dialectical image is a form of historical consciousness that breaks with the linear narrative of progress and recovers suppressed historical possibilities.

Drain of Wealth: The systematic transfer of economic resources from colonized to colonizing countries through mechanisms including taxation, the "home charges," remittance of profits, and the terms of trade. Analysis of the drain of wealth challenges the liberal claim that colonialism was beneficial to the colonized countries by demonstrating the systematic economic extraction that colonial rule involved.

Epistemologies of the South (Santos): The argument that the intellectual traditions and knowledge practices of the global South have been systematically suppressed by the dominance of Northern epistemological frameworks, and that recovering and developing these suppressed epistemologies is a necessary component of any genuinely transformative political project.

Financialization: The increasing dominance of financial capital over the real economy, associated with the liberalization of international capital flows in the neoliberal era. Financialization gives international financial capital a power over national governments that constrains their ability to implement redistributive policies.

Hegemony (Gramsci): The way in which a dominant class maintains its power not merely through coercion but through the active consent of the dominated classes, produced and maintained through the institutions of civil society. Hegemony is the cultural and ideological dimension of class power.

Historical Materialism: The Marxian method of analyzing history through the lens of the material conditions of production and the class relations they generate. Historical materialism insists that the analysis of historical events and processes must attend to the economic structures and class relations that shape them, while rejecting both crude economic determinism and idealist accounts that abstract historical development from its material conditions.

Ideological State Apparatuses (Althusser): The institutions through which the state reproduces the dominant ideology, including the educational system, the family, the media, and cultural institutions. Ideological State Apparatuses operate primarily through ideology rather than coercion, producing the "interpellation" of individuals as subjects who occupy specific positions within the relations of production.

Metabolic Rift (Foster, following Marx): The disruption of the metabolic relationship between human society and the natural world caused by capitalist production, which appropriates natural resources at rates that exceed nature's capacity for regeneration and generates pollution and ecological damage that impose enormous costs on current and future generations.

Organic Intellectual (Gramsci): An intellectual whose work is genuinely connected to the struggles of a specific class or social group, and who develops the theoretical and cultural resources needed by that group for its political project. The organic intellectual contrasts with the "traditional intellectual," whose apparent neutrality conceals a de facto alignment with the interests of the dominant class.

Platform Capitalism: The form of capitalist organization associated with large digital platforms that bring together large numbers of workers with large numbers of consumers, using algorithms to manage the labor process and to extract value from both workers and consumers. Platform capitalism typically involves the legal fiction of "independent contractors" to evade labor protections.

Primitive Accumulation (Marx): The historical process through which the preconditions for capitalist production were created, including the enclosure of common lands, the dispossession of peasants, the slave trade, and colonial extraction. Contemporary "primitive accumulation" involves the extension of capitalist property relations to resources that have previously been managed according to non-capitalist social principles.

Reification (Lukacs): The generalized process through which capitalist society transforms social relations, human activities, and aspects of consciousness into the form of things with fixed, calculable properties. Reification produces the mystification of social reality that presents historically contingent arrangements as natural and inevitable.

Surplus Repression (Marcuse): Repression of instinctual gratification in excess of what civilization actually requires, imposed by the specific social forms of capitalism in the service of the economic and political interests of the dominant class. The concept distinguishes between "basic repression," necessary for any form of social life, and "surplus repression," which serves class interests rather than the requirements of civilization.

Unequal Exchange (Amin, Emmanuel): The mechanism through which the global capitalist market systematically transfers value from peripheral to center countries, because the peripheral countries lack the technological, organizational, and political power to command prices that reflect the full value of their labor.

End of Appendix

Part Four of this textbook will address: The Philosophy of Language, the Politics of Translation, and the Archive of Bengali Thought.

PART FOUR: THE PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE, THE POLITICS OF TRANSLATION, AND THE ARCHIVE OF BENGALI THOUGHT

PREFACE TO PART FOUR

Part Three of this textbook constructed the broad intellectual architecture within which Abdul Kafi's scholarly work is situated, tracing the political economy, legal philosophy, psychological dimensions, and comparative frameworks that together constitute the theoretical landscape of Bengali Marxian scholarship. Part Four now descends into what might be called the substrate of all that intellectual work: language itself. It examines the philosophy of language as it bears on the specific intellectual practices of the Bengali Marxian tradition, the politics of translation as a site where power, knowledge, and cultural identity converge, and the archive of Bengali thought as a historically constituted repository of intellectual resources that shapes and is reshaped by every serious scholarly engagement.

Language is not simply the medium through which thought is transmitted. It is the medium in which thought takes shape, in which cultural memory is preserved and contested, in which the categories of analysis are formed and reformed, and in which the political claims of communities are articulated and challenged. For a scholar like Abdul Kafi, who works in Bengali, who brings

Marxian analytical tools to bear on Bengali texts, and who situates that work within a tradition of politically committed Bengali scholarship, the philosophy of language is not an abstract academic exercise. It is a set of living questions that his every intellectual act engages with, whether explicitly or implicitly.

The question of what Bengali is, and what Bengali literary and intellectual culture has been and continues to be, is inseparable from the question of what Kafi's work is doing and what it means. To read a Bengali text from the 1920s in 2025 is not simply to recover a fixed meaning that has been waiting in the text for a century. It is to bring a set of analytical categories, formed in a specific contemporary context, into encounter with a set of cultural and linguistic resources formed in a very different context, and to produce from that encounter something that is neither simply present nor simply past but genuinely historical: a form of understanding that illuminates both the past and the present by placing them in relation to each other.

This Part is organized around three large themes. The first is the philosophy of language, understood both in its Western analytic and continental forms and in the specific traditions of Bengali and Sanskrit linguistic philosophy that constitute an alternative and complementary framework for thinking about language, meaning, and interpretation. The second is the politics of translation, understood as a site where the power relations between languages and cultures are enacted and contested, and where the possibilities and limits of cross-cultural intellectual communication are tested. The third is the archive of Bengali thought, understood as a historically constituted body of texts, debates, institutions, and practices that constitutes the intellectual tradition within which Kafi's work is embedded and to which it contributes.

Throughout, we attend to the connections between these apparently theoretical questions and the specific political and cultural challenges of the current moment in India and Bengal. The philosophy of language is not a discipline removed from politics. It is one of the sites where the most fundamental political questions, about who has the right to speak, in what language, to whom, and with what authority, are negotiated and contested. Understanding this is essential for understanding what is at stake in the intellectual work of the Centre for Marxian Studies and in the scholarly practice of Abdul Kafi.

CHAPTER ONE: WHAT IS LANGUAGE? PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

1.1 The Question of Language as a Philosophical Problem

The question "what is language?" is one that has generated philosophical reflection across cultures and across millennia, from the Sanskrit grammarians of ancient India to the contemporary philosophers of language in the analytic tradition, from the Chinese philosophers of the Han dynasty to the structuralist and poststructuralist theorists of twentieth-century France. What makes this question philosophically interesting, and why does it matter for the study of a Bengali Marxian scholar in the twenty-first century?

The answer, in its most compressed form, is this: the question of language is the question of how meaning is possible, how communities of speakers share an understanding of the world and communicate that understanding to each other and across generations, and how this process of meaning-making and meaning-sharing is connected to the exercise of social power and the reproduction of social structures. These are not merely technical questions for linguists and philosophers. They are questions that go to the heart of what it means to be a social and political being, and they are questions that every serious engagement with texts, including the literary texts that constitute the object of Kafi's scholarship, must implicitly engage with.

The Western philosophical tradition has approached the question of language from several different directions, each of which has generated insights of lasting value and also limitations of enduring significance. The ancient Greek tradition, represented most influentially by Plato's *Cratylus* dialogue, debated whether the relationship between words and the things they refer to is natural or conventional. Plato himself was skeptical of language as a vehicle for philosophical truth, arguing in several dialogues that the ambiguities and imprecisions of ordinary language are obstacles to the philosophical quest for eternal, immutable truths. Aristotle, by contrast, developed a more positive account of language as the medium through which rational beings communicate their understanding of the world, and his analysis of the relationships between language, thought, and reality laid the foundations for the Western tradition of formal logic and the analysis of linguistic meaning.

The medieval tradition, both in Europe and in the Islamic world, developed sophisticated analyses of language in the context of theological and philosophical debates about the relationship between human language and the divine word, between the imperfect languages of specific peoples and the universal truths they struggle to express. The philosophy of language was inseparable from the question of translation, specifically the translation of sacred texts, and the debates about whether meaning can survive the passage from one language to another have resonated throughout the subsequent history of linguistic philosophy.

The modern Western tradition of the philosophy of language begins, in a meaningful sense, with Gottlob Frege's distinction between "sense" and "reference" at the end of the nineteenth century. Frege argued that the meaning of a linguistic expression consists of two distinct components: the reference, the actual object in the world that the expression picks out, and the sense, the mode of presentation through which the reference is determined. This distinction, deceptively simple in formulation, has generated an enormous body of philosophical analysis and debate, because it raises fundamental questions about the relationship between language, thought, and reality that are still not fully resolved.

The twentieth-century analytic tradition in the philosophy of language, represented by figures like Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, J.L. Austin, John Searle, W.V.O. Quine, Donald Davidson, and Saul Kripke, has developed a range of powerful analytical tools for understanding how language works: theories of reference, theories of meaning, theories of speech acts, and theories of interpretation. The continental tradition, represented by figures like Ferdinand de Saussure, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and Jacques Derrida, has developed a different but complementary set of approaches that emphasize the historical, social,

and political dimensions of language and the ways in which meaning is always already implicated in power and desire.

1.2 Saussure and the Structural Analysis of Language

Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*, published posthumously in 1916 from lecture notes compiled by his students, is one of the founding documents of modern linguistics and of the structuralist tradition that has been enormously influential in literary theory, anthropology, and cultural studies. Saussure's contribution was to provide a rigorous framework for analyzing language as a structured system of signs, and to identify the distinction between *langue* (the abstract system of language, the set of rules and conventions that govern linguistic communication within a given community) and *parole* (the individual acts of speaking and writing through which speakers use the system).

For Saussure, the linguistic sign is a two-sided entity consisting of a signifier (the sound-image or written form) and a signified (the concept). The relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary: there is no natural connection between the sounds that make up the word "tree" and the concept of a tree. The connection is entirely a matter of social convention, established by the practices of a linguistic community and maintained by its continued use. This arbitrariness of the sign is one of Saussure's most important insights, because it means that the categories through which speakers of a language organize their experience of the world are not natural but conventional, not inevitable but historically contingent.

The implications of this insight for the understanding of Bengali and its relationship to other languages are significant. The vocabulary and grammatical structure of Bengali reflect a specific history of encounters between Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, Portuguese, and English, a history that is inseparable from the political history of the Bengal region. The categories through which Bengali speakers organize their linguistic experience, the grammatical distinctions Bengali makes and does not make, the semantic fields it carves out and the ones it leaves undifferentiated, reflect this specific history. Understanding Bengali as a linguistic system means understanding the specific way in which the arbitrary conventions of the Bengali speech community have evolved through this history.

The structural analysis of language has been enormously productive in literary theory, because it provides a framework for analyzing texts as systems of signs in which meaning is produced not by individual elements in isolation but by the relations between elements. The development of structuralist literary criticism, associated with figures like Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, and Gerard Genette, drew directly on Saussurean linguistics to develop analytical tools for understanding the narrative structures, the rhetorical conventions, and the generic frameworks through which literary texts produce meaning.

The relevance of structuralist analysis to the kind of Marxian literary criticism that Kafi practices is complex. On the one hand, the structuralist tools for analyzing the formal properties of texts, their narrative structures, their rhetorical figures, their intertextual relations, are genuinely useful for the kind of close reading that serious literary criticism requires. On the other hand, the structuralist tendency to analyze texts as closed systems of internal relations, abstracting them

from their historical and social context, is at odds with the Marxian insistence on historical situatedness. The most productive Marxian literary criticism draws on the formal analytical tools of structuralism while refusing its ahistorical tendencies, treating texts as both formal systems and historical acts.

1.3 Wittgenstein and the Social Life of Language

Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophical development, from the logical atomism of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) to the therapeutic philosophy of language of the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), represents one of the most significant intellectual journeys in twentieth-century philosophy, and the later Wittgenstein's insights about the social character of language have been enormously influential in the philosophy of language and in social theory.

The key insight of the later Wittgenstein can be expressed in his concept of "language games" and the associated concept of "forms of life." Wittgenstein argued that meaning is not a property of individual words or sentences taken in isolation but is constituted by the use of words and sentences within specific social practices and activities, which he called language games. The meaning of a word is its use in the language, and that use is embedded in a form of life, a shared social practice, a way of acting and responding in the world that is irreducibly social.

This insight challenges both the referential theory of meaning (the idea that words mean by referring to things in the world) and the mentalist theory of meaning (the idea that words mean by expressing mental states). It insists, instead, that meaning is constituted in and through social practices, that it is inherently public and shared, and that the attempt to understand meaning in terms of private mental states or bare physical reference misses what is most important about how language works.

The implications of this insight for the understanding of literary language are significant. Literary texts are not simply systems of signs that refer to objects in the world or express mental states. They are forms of social practice, embedded in specific social contexts, engaging with specific audiences, drawing on and transforming specific cultural conventions. The meaning of a literary text is not something that the author has put into it that the reader merely recovers. It is something that is constituted in the encounter between text and reader, in a specific historical and cultural context, through a process that is always also a social event.

For the understanding of Kafi's scholarly practice, the Wittgensteinian insight is particularly relevant. When Kafi reads *Dhumketu* or *Raktakarobi* or *Langol*, he is not simply extracting a meaning that has been fixed in the text since it was written. He is engaging with these texts as forms of social practice, embedded in their specific historical context and now brought into encounter with the specific concerns and categories of the contemporary moment. The meaning he produces is not purely his own creation, but it is not simply given by the text either. It is the product of a specific act of reading, conditioned by his specific training, his specific political commitments, and his specific historical situation.

1.4 Heidegger, Gadamer, and the Hermeneutics of Understanding

The hermeneutic tradition in the philosophy of language, associated primarily with Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, offers a different and complementary perspective on the nature of linguistic meaning and the practice of interpretation. Where the analytic tradition tends to focus on the logical and semantic properties of language, the hermeneutic tradition focuses on the existential and historical dimensions of understanding, on the ways in which the process of interpreting texts is shaped by the interpreter's own historical situation and by the "tradition" within which both text and interpreter are embedded.

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, developed most fully in *Truth and Method* (1960), is particularly relevant to the understanding of the kind of historical literary scholarship that Kafi practices. Gadamer argues that understanding is always a "fusion of horizons": the interpreter brings to the text a "horizon," a set of presuppositions, expectations, and questions shaped by their own historical situation, and the text brings its own horizon, the specific set of meanings and concerns that it embodies in its original context. Understanding is not the erasure of one horizon by the other but the productive encounter between them, in which both are transformed.

The concept of the "fusion of horizons" is illuminating for the understanding of what happens when a contemporary Marxian literary critic reads a text from the 1920s. The critic does not simply inhabit the horizon of the original text, understanding it as its original readers would have understood it. That would be a form of historical antiquarianism that ignores the way in which the critic's own historical situation shapes and conditions the understanding they can achieve. But neither does the critic simply impose their own contemporary categories on the text, ignoring the ways in which the text's original context gives it a specific meaning that cannot be read off from the contemporary situation. The most sophisticated historical literary scholarship, which Kafi's work exemplifies, is precisely the kind of "fusion of horizons" that Gadamer describes: a reading that is attentive to both the historical specificity of the text and the contemporary concerns that motivate the reading.

Heidegger's contribution to the philosophy of language, while more difficult and more controversial than Gadamer's, is also relevant. Heidegger's famous claim that "language is the house of Being," developed most fully in his later writings including the essays collected in *On the Way to Language* (1959), insists on the fundamental role of language in the constitution of human experience. For Heidegger, language is not a tool that human beings use to communicate pre-formed thoughts. It is the medium within which Being discloses itself, within which the world becomes meaningful for human beings. The implication is that different languages are not merely different vehicles for the same content but constitute different ways of being in the world, different modes of access to reality.

This Heideggerian insight connects to the debate about linguistic relativity that we touched on in Part Three, and it has significant implications for the understanding of what is at stake in the choice to do intellectual work in Bengali rather than English. If Bengali is not merely a different vehicle for the same intellectual content that could equally be expressed in English, but is rather a different "house of Being," a different mode of access to reality that discloses dimensions of experience and understanding that English cannot fully capture, then the decision to work in Bengali is not merely practical but ontological: it is a decision about what kind of understanding one is trying to achieve and what kind of world one is trying to illuminate.

1.5 Sanskrit Linguistic Philosophy: Panini, Bhartrhari, and the Indian Tradition

The Western philosophical traditions we have been tracing represent only one strand of the global philosophical engagement with language. The Indian philosophical tradition, and specifically the tradition of Sanskrit linguistic philosophy, offers a rich body of reflection on language that is both genuinely alternative to the Western tradition and deeply relevant to the understanding of Bengali linguistic culture.

The tradition of Sanskrit grammar and linguistic philosophy is one of the most technically sophisticated intellectual achievements of any culture. Panini's *Ashtadhyayi*, composed in approximately the fourth century BCE, is a grammar of Sanskrit that is remarkable for its formal elegance and its theoretical depth. With approximately 4000 sutras (compact rules), it describes the Sanskrit language with a precision and comprehensiveness that was not equaled in any other grammatical tradition until the development of modern formal linguistics in the twentieth century. The *Ashtadhyayi* is not merely a descriptive grammar: it embodies a sophisticated theory of linguistic structure and a specific conception of the relationship between language and reality.

But the most philosophically significant figure in the Indian tradition of linguistic philosophy is Bhartrhari, a Sanskrit philosopher of the fifth century CE, whose *Vakyapadiya* (Treatise on Sentence and Word) presents a philosophical analysis of language that is in many ways more sophisticated and more philosophically interesting than any comparable work in the Western tradition until at least the nineteenth century.

Bhartrhari's central philosophical position is what scholars call the "sphota" theory of language. According to this theory, the real unit of linguistic meaning is not the individual phoneme, syllable, or word but the sentence as a whole. The meaning of a sentence cannot be derived simply by combining the meanings of its individual words, because the words themselves are abstractions from the concrete reality of the sentence, which is grasped as a unitary meaning-event (sphota) in a single act of understanding. Bhartrhari argues that this unitary meaning-event is ultimately identical with Brahman, the absolute reality of the universe: language, in its deepest nature, is not a human convention but the manifestation of the absolute.

This metaphysical commitment may seem remote from the concerns of Marxian literary scholarship, but the linguistic insights that Bhartrhari develops in the context of this metaphysics are of considerable philosophical interest regardless of their metaphysical grounding. The insistence that meaning is holistic, that it cannot be derived from the linear composition of atomic units but must be grasped in a single act of understanding that apprehends the whole, connects to the Wittgensteinian insight that meaning is use and to the hermeneutic insight that understanding involves the fusion of horizons. The insistence that language is constitutive of reality rather than merely descriptive of it connects to the Heideggerian claim that language is the house of Being.

The relevance of Bhartrhari's thought to the understanding of Bengali literary culture is not merely historical. The influence of the Sanskrit philosophical tradition on Bengali intellectual culture has been significant and continuous, shaping the way in which Bengali thinkers

understand the relationship between language, thought, and reality in ways that are not always made explicit. When Tagore writes in *Raktakarobi* about the red oleander as a symbol of indestructible human value, he is drawing on a conception of the relationship between symbol and meaning that owes something to the Sanskrit theory of *dhvani* (resonance), the theory developed by Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta that poetic language works through suggestion rather than direct statement, that the most profound meanings are those that are evoked rather than expressed.

1.6 Bakhtin and the Dialogic Imagination

Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian philosopher of language and culture whose work was suppressed during the Soviet period and only became widely known in the West from the 1970s onward, offers a theoretical framework for understanding language that is particularly relevant to the analysis of literary texts and their relationship to social life. Bakhtin's contribution has been so significant, and so relevant to the tradition of Marxian cultural analysis represented by the Centre for Marxian Studies, that it deserves extended discussion.

Bakhtin's central insight is what he calls the "dialogic" character of language. For Bakhtin, every utterance is inherently dialogic: it is addressed to a specific audience, it responds to prior utterances, and it anticipates future responses. The word, as Bakhtin famously put it, "meets" the alien word: every utterance is saturated with the voices of others, with the social meanings that have accumulated around specific words and forms of expression through their history of use. Language is not a neutral medium for the transmission of individual thought but a contested social space in which different voices, representing different social positions and different ways of understanding the world, struggle for dominance.

This dialogic theory of language has profound implications for the analysis of literary texts. Where the formalist tradition tended to analyze the literary text as a closed structure of internal formal relations, Bakhtin insists on the openness of the text to the social world: the text is constituted by the social voices it incorporates, and its meaning is produced in the encounter between those voices and the voices of its readers. The concept of "heteroglossia," the presence of multiple social languages within a single text, is Bakhtin's term for this fundamental feature of literary (and especially novelistic) language.

For the analysis of Bengali literary and journalistic texts of the 1920s, Bakhtin's dialogic theory is particularly illuminating. *Dhumketu*, as a political newspaper, is constitutively dialogic: it is addressed to a specific audience, responding to the specific political utterances of the colonial government and the nationalist movement, and anticipating the responses of its readers. Its specific rhetorical strategies, its choice of topics, its editorial voice, are all shaped by this dialogic situation. Understanding *Dhumketu* means understanding the specific social dialogue it was intervening in and the specific audience it was addressing.

Similarly, *Raktakarobi*, as a symbolist drama, is constituted by the different voices it contains: the voice of Nandini, the voice of the King, the voices of the miners. These voices represent different social positions, different ways of understanding the relationship between the individual and social power, and the meaning of the play is produced in the tension and dialogue between

them. Bakhtin's concept of "polyphony," originally developed in his analysis of Dostoevsky's novels, applies to Tagore's drama in the sense that no single voice in the play is simply authoritative: the King's perspective is no more fully endorsed than Nandini's, and the play's meaning is produced in the unresolved tension between them.

The Centre for Marxian Studies's inclusion of Craig Brandist, a Bakhtin scholar, among its participants reflects the intellectual connections between the Bakhtinian tradition and the Marxian cultural theory that has been central to the Centre's program. Brandist's work on the Bakhtin Circle, the group of Russian intellectuals of the 1920s that included Bakhtin, Voloshinov, and Medvedev, has illuminated the specifically Marxian dimensions of Bakhtin's thought that were often obscured by the conditions of Soviet intellectual life in which it was developed.

CHAPTER TWO: THE POLITICS OF TRANSLATION

2.1 Translation as a Theoretical Problem

Translation is one of the oldest and most fundamental problems in the philosophy of language, and it is also one of the most politically significant. The question of whether meaning can survive the passage from one language to another, and under what conditions and with what losses and transformations it does so, is both a theoretical question about the nature of linguistic meaning and a practical question about the conditions under which intellectual communication across linguistic boundaries is possible.

The theoretical question has been addressed from a range of philosophical perspectives, each of which highlights different aspects of the problem. The Romantic tradition, associated with figures like Wilhelm von Humboldt, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Novalis, tended toward the view that each language embodies a distinctive "worldview" (*Weltanschauung*) that cannot be fully captured in translation. For Humboldt, language is not merely a tool for expressing pre-formed thoughts but is the medium through which the thinking of a specific people (*Volk*) takes shape: each language constitutes a specific mode of articulating the world, and the differences between languages reflect not merely different conventions for labeling the same realities but genuinely different ways of experiencing and understanding the world.

The analytic philosophical tradition has been more skeptical of this Romantic view. W.V.O. Quine's argument for the "indeterminacy of translation," developed in *Word and Object* (1960), argues that translation between languages is necessarily underdetermined by the evidence: given any set of observed linguistic behaviors, multiple incompatible translation schemes are possible, and there is no fact of the matter that determines which scheme is correct. This argument, while technically sophisticated, tends toward the conclusion that translation is always approximate and that the apparent precision of translated meanings conceals an irreducible indeterminacy.

The most practically useful approach to translation theory, for the purposes of understanding the politics of translation in the context of Bengali intellectual culture, is probably that of the

hermeneutic tradition, particularly as developed by Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur's analysis of translation, most fully developed in *On Translation* (2004), treats translation not as a technical problem of finding equivalents for individual words and sentences but as a hermeneutic task of understanding and reproducing the meaning of a text as a whole, in a different linguistic and cultural context. For Ricoeur, translation always involves "hospitality" to the foreign, an openness to the otherness of the source text that resists the temptation to domesticate it, to make it too easily intelligible by assimilating it to the categories and conventions of the target language.

2.2 The Colonial Politics of Translation

The politics of translation in the colonial context is one of the most significant and least adequately theorized dimensions of colonial cultural power. The colonial administration of India depended fundamentally on translation: the translation of Indian legal texts and practices into the categories of British law, the translation of Indian literature and philosophy into the categories of European scholarship, the translation of Indian political grievances into the language of petitions and legal arguments that the colonial administration could recognize. Each of these translations involved not merely the transfer of meaning but its transformation in ways that served the interests of the colonial power.

The founding of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 by William Jones, and the subsequent development of Indological scholarship by Jones, Charles Wilkins, Henry Thomas Colebrooke, and their successors, involved an enormous translation project: the translation of Sanskrit, Persian, and Bengali texts into English, and their interpretation within the categories of European classical scholarship. This translation project had complex and contradictory consequences. On the one hand, it made a vast body of South Asian intellectual and literary heritage accessible to European readers and contributed to the development of comparative linguistics, the study of Indo-European languages, and the transformation of European understanding of human cultural diversity. On the other hand, it created an Orientalist framework, in Said's sense, that interpreted South Asian texts and traditions through categories derived from European scholarship in ways that systematically distorted their meaning and served the ideological requirements of colonial rule.

The Orientalist framework for the interpretation of Indian literature and philosophy typically involved a temporal displacement: Indian texts were read as evidence of a "timeless" Indian tradition, an unchanging essence of Indian civilization, rather than as responses to specific historical situations and participants in ongoing debates. This temporal displacement served colonial ideology by naturalizing Indian "backwardness" as an expression of a timeless essence rather than a product of specific historical conditions, including the conditions of colonial exploitation.

The Bengali nationalist response to Orientalist translation involved both a rejection of the Orientalist framework and a strategic use of translation for counter-hegemonic purposes. Bengali nationalist intellectuals from Bankimchandra onward used the translation of European texts, and the translation of Bengali texts into European languages, as instruments of cultural politics: asserting the equality and indeed the superiority of Bengali and Indian intellectual traditions,

challenging the colonial claim to cultural superiority, and developing a distinctive modern Bengali cultural identity that could serve as the basis for nationalist mobilization.

2.3 Translation and the Marxian Tradition in Bengal

The translation of Marxian texts into Bengali, and the adaptation of Marxian concepts to the specific context of Bengali intellectual culture, is a dimension of the politics of translation that is directly relevant to understanding the tradition within which Kafi works. The history of Marxian translation into Bengali is a history of intellectual choices about which texts to translate, how to render specific Marxian concepts in Bengali, and what aspects of the Marxian tradition are most relevant to the specific concerns of Bengali intellectual and political life.

The Communist Party of India began organizing systematic translation of Marxist texts into Bengali from the 1930s onward, and the National Book Agency, which has published Kafi's work, was itself a product of this translation project. The choice of which texts to translate, which was inevitably also a choice about which aspects of the Marxian tradition to emphasize and which to leave in the background, reflected specific assessments of the needs of the Bengali communist movement at specific historical moments.

The translation of Marxian concepts into Bengali also involves specific linguistic choices that are philosophically significant. How does one render "commodity fetishism" in Bengali? What Bengali terms best capture the distinction between "use value" and "exchange value"? How does one translate "hegemony," a concept whose Italian original (*egemonia*) already carries specific political connotations that are not fully captured even by its English rendering? These are not merely technical questions. They are questions about the relationship between Marxian categories and the specific cultural and linguistic context of Bengali social life, and the answers given to them shape the kind of Marxian analysis that becomes available within the Bengali intellectual tradition.

The philosopher Ramkrishna Bhattacharya, who has participated in the Centre for Marxian Studies, has made significant contributions to the analysis of how Indian philosophical concepts, including concepts from the materialist tradition of Charvaka philosophy, relate to Marxian materialism. His work exemplifies the kind of productive encounter between Marxian concepts and the specifically Indian philosophical tradition that the Centre has fostered, an encounter that is always also a form of translation in the broadest sense.

2.4 The Translation of Bengali Scholarship into Global Intellectual Conversations

The problem of translating Bengali scholarship for international audiences is one that we have touched on in previous chapters, but it deserves more extended analysis here. The fundamental issue is one of what we might call "epistemic injustice": the systematic undervaluation of knowledge produced in certain languages and cultural contexts by the global academic market.

Miranda Fricker's concept of "epistemic injustice," developed in *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (2007), refers to the ways in which social power operates to disadvantage certain groups in their capacity as knowers, both by rendering their testimony less credible

(testimonial injustice) and by depriving them of the conceptual resources to understand their own experience (hermeneutical injustice). The concept can be extended from its original application to individual social groups to the analysis of entire intellectual traditions and languages: the systematic failure of the global academic market to recognize the value of knowledge produced in Bengali, or in other languages of the global South, is a form of epistemic injustice at the level of language and culture.

The response to this epistemic injustice takes several forms. One is the development of translation projects that make Bengali scholarship accessible in English and other international languages, not as a concession to the dominance of these languages but as a political act of insisting on the international significance of Bengali intellectual contributions. Another is the development of international networks of scholars who are committed to the recognition of Bengali and other Southern intellectual traditions on their own terms. And a third is the development of digital platforms and archives that make Bengali scholarly and literary work accessible in the original language to the growing international community of Bengali scholars and students.

The specific challenge for Kafi's work is that the texts he analyzes, *Dhumketu*, *Raktakarobi*, and *Langol*, exist in a complex translational situation. *Raktakarobi* has been translated into English, as have many of Tagore's other works, and these translations have made it accessible to international readers. But the specific analytical framework that Kafi brings to the reading of these texts, the Bengali Marxian literary critical tradition in which his analysis is embedded, has not been adequately translated, and the result is that the international reception of Tagore's work often lacks the political depth and historical specificity that the best Bengali criticism, including Kafi's work, provides.

2.5 Walter Benjamin on the Task of the Translator

Walter Benjamin's 1923 essay "The Task of the Translator," written as an introduction to his German translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*, is one of the most philosophically provocative and most widely debated texts in the theory of translation, and its insights have particular relevance to the understanding of the political dimensions of translation in the context of Bengali intellectual culture.

Benjamin's central argument is that the goal of translation is not to produce a text that gives the reader the same experience as reading the original, nor even to convey the "meaning" of the original in the sense of its communicable content. Rather, the task of the translator is to release what Benjamin calls the "pure language" that underlies and is fragmented across all individual languages. Every individual language, for Benjamin, expresses a specific dimension of what things mean and what the world is like, a dimension that no other language fully captures. Translation brings different languages into relation, and in that encounter, something of the "pure language" toward which all individual languages point is momentarily revealed.

This mystical-theological dimension of Benjamin's essay may seem remote from the materialist concerns of Marxian scholarship. But there is a more secular version of Benjamin's insight that is of considerable value for understanding what is at stake in the translation of Bengali scholarship:

the idea that translation, at its best, does not merely transfer content from one language to another but reveals what is specific and untranslatable in each language, what each language does that no other language can do in quite the same way. The task of the translator, on this view, is precisely to mark these untranslatable dimensions, to indicate where the resources of the original language exceed those of the target language, and thereby to make visible the specific richness of the language and culture being translated.

Applied to the translation of Bengali literary and intellectual texts for international audiences, this approach implies that the best translation is not the one that makes the original seem most natural and familiar in the target language but the one that most faithfully preserves the foreignness of the original, its specific cultural and linguistic resources, even when this makes the translation more demanding for the reader. The goal is not to domesticate Bengali intellectual culture for international consumption but to make available, in some form, the specific insights and perspectives that Bengali intellectual culture offers.

2.6 Postcolonial Translation Theory: Spivak, Niranjana, and Beyond

Postcolonial translation theory, developed by scholars including Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Tejaswini Niranjana, and others, has made a significant contribution to the understanding of the politics of translation in the colonial and postcolonial context. This tradition deserves extended attention, both for its insights and for the ways in which it connects to and diverges from the Marxian analytical framework that informs the Centre for Marxian Studies.

Spivak's "Politics of Translation" (1992) argues that translation is a form of political power, that the choices made by translators about how to render the original reflect and reproduce the power relations between the languages and cultures involved. Spivak is particularly concerned with the translation of texts by women writers from the global South, arguing that the dominant modes of translation into English tend to domesticate these texts, to make them fit the expectations of a liberal metropolitan readership, in ways that erase their specific cultural and political significance. Her alternative, the practice of "close translation," involves a scrupulous attention to the specific linguistic and cultural resources of the original that resists the temptation to smooth over what is unfamiliar or difficult.

Tejaswini Niranjana's *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (1992) develops a more systematic analysis of the role of translation in the construction of colonial knowledge. Drawing on deconstruction, the philosophy of language, and Marxian cultural theory, Niranjana argues that colonial translations of Indian texts were not neutral acts of cultural transmission but actively constructed "images" of India that served the ideological requirements of colonial rule. The British translations of the Gita, the Ramayana, and other Sanskrit texts, for example, produced interpretations that represented Indian philosophy as otherworldly, passive, and concerned primarily with spiritual rather than political questions, an interpretation that served colonial ideology by naturalizing Indian political passivity and denying the political dimensions of Indian cultural life.

The engagement of postcolonial translation theory with the Marxian tradition of cultural analysis represented by the Centre for Marxian Studies has been productive but also contested. The

postcolonial tradition's emphasis on the discursive dimensions of colonial power, on the role of representation and translation in the construction of colonial authority, is broadly compatible with the Gramscian analysis of hegemony and the Althusserian analysis of ideological state apparatuses. But there are also tensions, particularly around the question of the relationship between discourse and material conditions. The Marxian tradition tends to insist that the analysis of colonial ideology and colonial translation must be grounded in the analysis of the material conditions of colonial exploitation, and that an exclusive focus on discourse and representation risks losing sight of the economic and political structures that give colonial power its specific character.

CHAPTER THREE: THE ARCHIVE OF BENGALI THOUGHT

3.1 What is an Archive?

The concept of the archive, as a theoretical and political concept rather than merely a practical one, has received significant philosophical attention since Michel Foucault's analysis of the "archive" in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969). For Foucault, the archive is not simply the collection of documents preserved in specific institutions (libraries, archives, museums). It is the system of rules, the set of conditions and constraints, that determines what can be said, what counts as a meaningful statement, and what is excluded from the domain of legitimate discourse in any given historical period. The archive, in this sense, is the condition of possibility of discourse: it is what makes certain things sayable and others unsayable, certain knowledges possible and others impossible.

This Foucauldian concept of the archive has been enormously productive in the analysis of colonial and postcolonial knowledge production. The colonial archive, the body of documents, texts, images, and data produced by and for the colonial administration, reflects the specific knowledge/power interests of colonial rule. It preserves certain kinds of information (the enumeration of populations, the classification of castes and communities, the description of customs and practices relevant to colonial governance) while excluding others (the perspectives of the colonized on their own situation, the forms of knowledge production that do not fit the categories of colonial administration). Reading the colonial archive critically, against the grain, to recover the excluded perspectives and the suppressed voices, is one of the most important tasks of postcolonial scholarship.

But the archive of Bengali thought is not simply the colonial archive. It is a complex and contested body of texts, institutions, and practices that has been produced over centuries, shaped by multiple forces including Sanskrit learning, Persian and Islamic scholarship, colonial education, nationalist politics, and Marxian analysis. Understanding this archive, and understanding the place of Kafi's work within it, requires attending to its complexity and its internal contestations, rather than reducing it to a single dominant narrative.

3.2 The Archive of Sanskrit Learning

The deepest stratum of the archive of Bengali thought is the tradition of Sanskrit learning that has been produced and transmitted in Bengal over more than two thousand years. Sanskrit scholarship in Bengal includes textual traditions in philosophy (Nyaya-Vaisesika, Samkhya-Yoga, Advaita Vedanta, Navya-Nyaya), grammar (Panini's tradition and its Bengali commentators), poetics and rhetoric (Kavyasastra, Alamkarasastra), devotional literature (Vaishnavism, particularly the tradition associated with Chaitanya), and a rich tradition of Sanskrit literary composition.

The Navya-Nyaya tradition, the "new logic" school of Indian philosophy that was particularly associated with the scholars of Navadvipa in Bengal, represents one of the most technically sophisticated intellectual achievements of any culture. The Navya-Nyaya philosophers developed a formal system of logic and epistemology that is in many respects comparable in rigor to the formal logic developed in Europe from Leibniz onward, and which addresses many of the same problems of reference, predication, and inference that have occupied the Western analytic tradition. The work of scholars like Gangesa, Raghunatha Siromani, and Gadadhara constitutes a rich body of philosophical analysis that is still not adequately known or appreciated outside the specialist community.

The relevance of this Sanskrit philosophical tradition to the understanding of Kafi's intellectual work may not be immediately obvious. Kafi is a Marxian literary scholar, not a Sanskrit philosopher, and the texts he analyzes are products of early twentieth-century political culture, not of the classical Sanskrit tradition. But the Sanskrit tradition is part of the archive of Bengali thought within which he works, in the sense that the categories, metaphors, and intellectual habits that Bengali thought has developed over centuries are shaped by this tradition in ways that are often not consciously acknowledged.

The concept of dhvani (suggestion, resonance) in Sanskrit poetics, which we have already mentioned, is a case in point. When Tagore writes in *Raktakarobi* using the red oleander as a symbol of indestructible human value, he is drawing on a tradition of symbolic and suggestive language that has its theoretical articulation in the Sanskrit theory of dhvani. Understanding this dimension of Tagore's literary practice, and understanding what makes his symbolism philosophically interesting rather than merely decorative, requires engagement with the tradition of Sanskrit poetics that provides its theoretical framework.

3.3 The Persian and Islamic Archive

The second major stratum of the archive of Bengali thought is the tradition of Persian and Islamic scholarship that has been produced in Bengal since at least the twelfth century CE, when the first Muslim rulers established their court in Bengal and created the conditions for the development of a distinctively Bengali Islamic intellectual culture.

The Persian and Islamic tradition in Bengal is extraordinarily rich and has been seriously underrepresented in the standard accounts of Bengali intellectual history, which have tended to privilege the Sanskrit and Hindu traditions. The literature of Bengal from the medieval period includes a rich body of Persian court poetry, Sufi literature, and Islamic scholarly writing, as well

as the development of Bengali literary forms that drew on both the Sanskrit and the Persian-Islamic traditions.

The Masnavi tradition of Persian poetry, associated above all with Rumi, exercised a significant influence on the development of Bengali Sufi literature, producing a body of devotional poetry in Bengali that draws on the themes and forms of Persian mysticism while adapting them to the specific cultural context of Bengal. The tradition of Bengali "punthi" literature, a genre of narrative poetry that addressed both secular and religious themes in a popular Bengali literary style, drew on both Sanskrit and Persian literary models and addressed audiences that spanned both Hindu and Muslim communities.

For Abdul Kafi as a Muslim Bengali intellectual, this Persian-Islamic archive is not merely of historical interest. It is part of the living tradition within which he works and which gives his intellectual identity its specific character. The fact that Bengali intellectual culture has been shaped by both the Sanskrit and the Persian-Islamic traditions, and that the interaction between these traditions has produced forms of cultural life that are irreducible to either, is an important resource for the kind of secular, pluralist Bengali cultural identity that the tradition of Marxian scholarship in Bengal has sought to sustain.

3.4 The Colonial Archive and Its Discontents

The colonial archive, the body of knowledge produced by and for the colonial administration of Bengal, is a deeply ambivalent component of the archive of Bengali thought. It contains a vast amount of information about Bengali society, economy, culture, and history, much of which is not available from any other source. But it also contains systematic distortions, produced by the specific knowledge/power interests of the colonial administration, that have shaped the subsequent understanding of Bengali history and culture in ways that are still being worked through.

The colonial archive includes the records of the revenue administration, the census, the courts, the police, and the political intelligence services, as well as the productions of Orientalist scholarship: the grammars, dictionaries, translations, and interpretive essays produced by the scholars of the Asiatic Society and their successors. Each of these components of the colonial archive is valuable as a source of information while also being shaped by the specific purposes for which it was produced and the specific ideological assumptions of its producers.

The census records, for example, are an invaluable source of demographic and social information. But the census's classification of the population by caste and religion, which became increasingly rigid over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, also played a role in the hardening of communal identities that contributed to the political dynamics of partition. The act of enumeration, of counting and classifying people according to specific categories, is not a neutral technical act. It is a political act that constitutes the categories it purports merely to describe.

The Orientalist scholarship of the colonial period is similarly ambivalent. Jones's translation of Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*, Wilkins's translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Colebrooke's essays on Hindu

law: these were genuine intellectual achievements that made important texts and traditions accessible to European readers and contributed to the development of comparative scholarship. But they were also shaped by the Orientalist framework that read Indian texts as expressions of a timeless Indian essence rather than as participants in ongoing historical debates, and they served the ideological requirement of colonial rule by producing images of India that naturalized its political subordination.

Reading the colonial archive critically, recovering from it what it suppresses and challenging what it distorts, is one of the most important tasks of postcolonial scholarship, and it is a task that the Centre for Marxian Studies has contributed to through its seminars on colonial economic history, on the history of the communist movement in Bengal, and on the cultural politics of the colonial period.

3.5 The Nationalist Archive: The Bengal Renaissance and Its Texts

The Bengal Renaissance produced a distinctive archive of texts, institutions, and intellectual practices that has been enormously influential in shaping the subsequent tradition of Bengali intellectual culture. This archive includes the literary works of Bankimchandra, Rabindranath, and their contemporaries, the journals and newspapers of the nationalist press, the productions of the Brahmo Samaj and other reform organizations, the speeches and essays of nationalist political figures, and the institutional infrastructure of Bengali civil society including schools, colleges, debating societies, and cultural organizations.

This nationalist archive is not a unified or coherent body of material. It reflects the tensions and contradictions of the nationalist movement itself, including the tensions between Hindu and Muslim nationalism, between elite and popular culture, between reformist and conservative approaches to social change, and between the different political strategies of the nationalist movement. Understanding these tensions and contradictions is essential for understanding both the achievements and the limitations of the Bengali Renaissance.

Sumit Sarkar's critical history of the Bengal Renaissance, particularly his essay "The Radicalism of Intellectuals," provides an essential framework for this understanding. Sarkar argues that the radicalism of the Bengal Renaissance intellectuals was real but limited: it challenged specific features of colonial rule and specific aspects of traditional social practice, but it was contained within a class framework that reflected the specific interests of the educated Hindu middle class and prevented it from engaging seriously with the agrarian question or with the communal divisions that the colonial period was intensifying.

Understanding these limitations is not a matter of retrospective condemnation. It is a matter of historical analysis: understanding why specific intellectual movements produce the insights they do and miss what they miss, given the specific historical conditions of their production. And understanding these limitations is also a matter of understanding what came after: why the movements of the 1920s, including those represented by Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol, represented both continuations of the Renaissance tradition and departures from it, challenging its class and communal limitations while drawing on its cultural and intellectual resources.

3.6 The Progressive Archive: From IPTA to the Present

The progressive literary and cultural tradition in Bengal, associated with the Progressive Writers' Association, the Indian People's Theatre Association, and the broader tradition of left cultural politics that flourished in Bengal from the 1930s onward, constitutes a distinctive stratum of the archive of Bengali thought that is directly relevant to understanding the intellectual tradition within which Kafi works.

The IPTA (Indian People's Theatre Association), founded in 1943, represented the convergence of the Communist Party's cultural politics with the talent of some of the most gifted writers, musicians, filmmakers, and theater practitioners in Bengal. Its productions drew on folk traditions, on classical Bengali literary forms, on Tagore's legacy, and on the political urgency of the anti-colonial and anti-fascist struggle to create forms of cultural expression that were simultaneously politically engaged and aesthetically ambitious.

The tradition of progressive Bengali song, associated with composers and performers like Hemanga Biswas, Salil Chowdhury, and later Bhupen Hazarika, represents one of the most significant and widely disseminated productions of this progressive archive. The songs of this tradition drew on folk melodies, on Tagore's musical heritage, and on the rhythms and idioms of Bengali working-class life to create forms of musical expression that were accessible to mass audiences while addressing serious political themes. The political song tradition in Bengal is not a marginal or purely documentary phenomenon. It is one of the most powerful vehicles through which the progressive political tradition has sustained its cultural life and reached audiences beyond the educated middle class.

The progressive Bengali film tradition, associated above all with Ritwik Ghatak, is another major component of this archive. Ghatak's films, which addressed the experience of partition, of displacement, and of the crushing of progressive political hopes in the 1950s and 1960s, represent a form of cultural production that combines extraordinary aesthetic ambition with deep political commitment. The influence of Ghatak's work on subsequent generations of Bengali filmmakers, and the continuing relevance of his analysis of the cultural and psychological consequences of partition, make him one of the most important figures in the archive of progressive Bengali thought.

The relation of this progressive cultural archive to the literary texts that Kafi analyzes is one of direct genealogical connection. Dhumketu and Langol are among the founding documents of the progressive Bengali cultural tradition, the texts in which the combination of literary quality and political commitment that the IPTA tradition would develop was first articulated in the Bengali context. And Raktakarobi, while it comes from a different cultural tradition, the tradition of Rabindranath's aesthetic humanism, provided a model of the use of literary form for the critique of capitalist dehumanization that has been enormously influential in the progressive tradition.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE POLITICS OF LITERARY CANON FORMATION

4.1 What Is a Literary Canon?

The concept of the literary canon, the body of texts that a literary culture treats as its most significant and most enduring achievements, is one of the most contested concepts in contemporary literary theory. The canon is not a natural or neutral selection of objectively superior texts. It is a historically produced construction that reflects the specific values, interests, and power relations of the social groups that have the authority to make canonical judgments.

The most important and most influential argument for the political critique of the literary canon in the English-language context was developed by feminist scholars in the 1970s and 1980s. Scholars like Kate Millett, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, and Elaine Showalter demonstrated that the traditional literary canon, with its overwhelming emphasis on works by male authors addressing male concerns through literary forms developed by and for male audiences, reflected a systematic exclusion of women's literary production and women's perspectives. The "recovery" of neglected women writers, the development of feminist literary criticism, and the transformation of literary syllabi to include women's writing represented a major shift in the politics of canonical authority.

Similar arguments have been made from the perspectives of other marginalized groups: African American scholars argued for the recognition of the African American literary tradition; postcolonial scholars argued for the recognition of literatures in the colonial and postcolonial world; working-class scholars argued for the recognition of working-class writing as a legitimate literary tradition. Each of these arguments challenged the implicit claim that the canonical tradition represented a universal standard of literary value, revealing it instead as a particular selection that served specific cultural and political interests.

The Marxian analysis of canonical formation emphasizes the class dimensions of these processes. The literary canon, from a Marxian perspective, reflects the values and interests of the educated classes who have the cultural authority to make canonical judgments, and it tends to exclude the literary productions of those who lack this cultural authority: the working class, the peasantry, women, ethnic and religious minorities. The challenge to the canon, in Marxian terms, is not merely an exercise in cultural diversity but a political act of challenging the class-based monopoly on legitimate cultural authority.

4.2 The Bengali Literary Canon and Its Politics

The Bengali literary canon has been shaped by a specific set of historical and political forces that reflect the specific character of Bengali intellectual culture. The central figure in the Bengali literary canon is unquestionably Rabindranath Tagore, whose work spans poetry, fiction, drama, essay, music, painting, and philosophy in a way that has no parallel in any other modern literary tradition. The dominance of Tagore in the Bengali canon is such that it has, at times, become an obstacle to the recognition of other significant Bengali writers, particularly those who have worked in different traditions or addressed different audiences.

The canonical status of Tagore raises a specific challenge for Marxian literary criticism. Tagore is clearly a major literary figure of global significance, and any account of Bengali literature that

did not engage seriously with his work would be simply inadequate. But the ways in which Tagore's canonical status has been constructed, the specific works that have been emphasized and the specific aspects of his work that have been treated as central, reflect the specific interests of the educated Bengali middle class that has controlled the institutions of canonical authority. The Tagore who appears in the standard Bengali literary canon is primarily the lyric poet, the Nobel Prize winner, the universal humanist: a Tagore whose political and social critique has been systematically downplayed in favor of a more aesthetically acceptable image of timeless humanist spirituality.

Kafi's choice of *Raktakarobi* as one of the three texts at the center of his major work is a canonical intervention: it insists on the relevance of Tagore's specifically political and social critique, recovering the anti-capitalist dimensions of one of Tagore's later plays that have been marginalized in the dominant canonical construction of his work. This is not a rejection of Tagore's canonical status but a challenge to the way that status has been constructed, an insistence on the full range and depth of Tagore's engagement with the political questions of his time.

The inclusion of *Dhumketu* and *Langol* alongside *Raktakarobi* in Kafi's analytical framework is a more radical canonical intervention. These are not canonical texts in the standard sense: they are not works that have been widely taught, widely discussed, or widely recognized as canonical achievements. The inclusion of Kazi Nazrul Islam's political journalism alongside Tagore's symbolist drama is a challenge to the canonical hierarchy that places the high literary form above the political and journalistic form, insisting that Nazrul's journalism is a literary achievement of comparable significance to Tagore's drama. And the inclusion of *Langol*, the communist journal, alongside both Tagore and Nazrul, is a challenge to the canonical exclusion of explicitly Marxian cultural production from the category of significant Bengali literature.

4.3 Oral Tradition, Folk Culture, and the Limits of the Written Archive

Any account of the archive of Bengali thought that focuses exclusively on written texts is necessarily incomplete. The oral tradition, the tradition of folk culture, of itinerant singers and performers, of ritual practices and communal celebrations, of stories told and songs sung in villages and neighborhoods across Bengal, constitutes a dimension of Bengali cultural life that has been systematically marginalized in the canonical tradition while remaining fundamental to the lived experience of the majority of Bengali-speaking people.

The oral tradition in Bengal is extraordinarily rich. The tradition of Baul music and philosophy, associated with wandering spiritual singers who reject the orthodoxies of both Hinduism and Islam in favor of a syncretic, humanistic spirituality, represents one of the most distinctive and original achievements of Bengali folk culture. The tradition of Jatra, the popular theatrical form that has addressed both mythological and contemporary social themes to mass audiences in rural and semi-urban Bengal, represents another major strand of popular cultural production that has been largely absent from the canonical literary archive.

The relationship between oral tradition and written literature in Bengal is complex and productive. Rabindranath Tagore drew extensively on folk melodies and rhythms in developing

his distinctive musical style (Rabindra Sangeet), and the progressive cultural tradition of the IPTA drew on folk cultural forms in developing its politically engaged cultural programs. The oral and the written are not simply separate traditions but are in constant interaction, with the oral tradition providing the living cultural substrate from which written literature periodically refreshes itself.

The inclusion of oral tradition and folk culture in the archive of Bengali thought has methodological implications for the kind of literary scholarship represented by Kafi's work. An exclusive focus on written, published texts misses the ways in which those texts are embedded in and responsive to a broader cultural life that includes oral, performative, and communal dimensions. The most adequate account of the three texts that Kafi analyzes would attend not only to their written forms but to their relationships with the oral and performative traditions of their time: the oral culture of political agitation and public speaking within which Dhumketu circulated, the tradition of theatrical performance within which Raktakarobi was embedded, and the oral tradition of political song within which the poetry of Langol was disseminated.

4.4 The Digital Archive and New Possibilities for Bengali Studies

The digitization of archival materials and the development of digital platforms for scholarly communication are creating new possibilities for the study of Bengali literature and intellectual culture that are transforming the field. The digitization of historical periodicals, including collections of Dhumketu and Langol that would previously have been accessible only in a handful of libraries, makes it possible for researchers anywhere in the world to engage with these primary sources. The development of digital tools for text analysis makes it possible to analyze large bodies of Bengali text in ways that were previously impossible.

These developments are not without their complications. The digitization of archival materials is itself a selective process that reflects specific institutional and commercial interests, and the materials that have been digitized do not represent a neutral sample of the full archival record. The bias toward institutionally preserved materials tends to perpetuate the canonical hierarchies of the print archive, giving priority to the texts and periodicals that were collected and preserved by major institutions while leaving less institutionally prominent materials in relative obscurity.

The development of Bengali-language digital scholarship is particularly significant. The creation of digital platforms for Bengali literary and intellectual discussion, the development of Bengali-language academic journals in digital form, and the development of digital tools for the analysis of Bengali text are all contributing to the transformation of the landscape of Bengali studies in ways that create new opportunities for the kind of politically engaged literary scholarship represented by Kafi's work.

CHAPTER FIVE: WITTGENSTEIN, FORMS OF LIFE, AND THE POLITICS OF MEANING

5.1 Ordinary Language and Extraordinary Claims

The late Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, developed in the *Philosophical Investigations* and other later works, offers a powerful set of insights for the understanding of the relationship between ordinary language and the extraordinary claims of literary, political, and philosophical discourse. These insights are relevant to the understanding of how the texts that Kafi analyzes work, how they make their political and cultural interventions, and what makes them powerful as forms of expression.

Wittgenstein's central methodological insight is that philosophical problems typically arise from the "bewitchment" of our intelligence by language: the tendency to misunderstand the grammar of our language and to take ordinary language expressions as descriptions of extraordinary metaphysical entities or processes. The task of philosophical analysis, for Wittgenstein, is not to develop new theories about reality but to dissolve philosophical problems by returning words to their everyday use and attending to the actual practice of language rather than to misleading pictures of what language is supposed to do.

Applied to the analysis of literary language, this insight suggests that the power of literary texts lies not in their reference to transcendent realities that ordinary language cannot express but in their specific, concrete use of language: the precise choice of words, the rhythmic and sonic qualities of the writing, the specific images and metaphors, the specific narrative structures and forms. Literary language is not a departure from ordinary language toward some higher linguistic register: it is a specific use of the resources of ordinary language that achieves its effects through exactness and specificity rather than through departure from the everyday.

This Wittgensteinian insight connects interestingly to the tradition of Bengali poetic theory, particularly the tradition associated with Tagore's own reflections on poetry and language. Tagore consistently insisted that the power of poetry lies in its concrete specificity, in its ability to give a precise and evocative shape to experiences and perceptions that resist abstract formulation. The red oleander in *Raktakarobi* is not a symbol in the sense of a conventional sign standing for a predetermined meaning. It is a specific, concrete image whose power derives from its precise sensory qualities, from the associations it evokes in the Bengali cultural context, and from the specific narrative situation in which it appears.

5.2 Language Games and the University

Wittgenstein's concept of language games, understood as specific forms of language use embedded in specific social practices and forms of life, provides a productive framework for analyzing the specific forms of language use that characterize the university as an intellectual institution.

The university is not a single language game but a complex of overlapping and sometimes conflicting language games: the language game of academic writing and publication, the language game of classroom teaching, the language game of institutional governance and administration, the language game of political activism and advocacy, and the language game of everyday social interaction among colleagues, students, and staff. Each of these language games has its own specific conventions, its own criteria for what counts as a successful move, and its own forms of authority and exclusion.

The language game of academic writing is particularly significant for understanding the situation of scholars like Kafi. Academic writing in any discipline involves a set of conventions about form, citation, argumentation, and evidence that are specific to the academic institution and that have their own power dynamics. The conventions of academic writing in English-language literary and cultural studies are dominated by the standards of the major international journals and university presses, and these standards tend to privilege specific forms of theoretical sophistication, specific modes of citation and argumentation, and specific research questions over others.

Writing in Bengali, within the conventions of the Bengali academic and intellectual tradition, means participating in a different language game, with different conventions and different criteria of success. The conventions of Bengali scholarly writing, shaped by the specific history of Bengali intellectual culture, include a greater emphasis on the rhetorical and essayistic qualities of the writing, a different relationship between scholarly argument and political commitment, and a different understanding of the appropriate audience for scholarly work. Understanding these conventions, and understanding how Kafi's work operates within them, is essential for understanding what his work is doing and why it matters.

5.3 The Politics of Naming and the Language of Caste, Community, and Class

The politics of naming is one of the most direct expressions of the relationship between language and power. The names given to social groups, historical events, political institutions, and cultural practices are not neutral labels: they are assertions of specific interpretive frameworks and specific political evaluations that are themselves sites of contest and struggle.

In the Indian context, the politics of naming is particularly charged. The name "Dalit," meaning "broken" or "ground down," adopted by the movement of former untouchables as their preferred self-designation, represents a political choice that contrasts with both the colonial administrative category of "Scheduled Castes" and the term "Harijan" (children of God) introduced by Gandhi, which many members of the movement regard as patronizing. The politics of this naming reflects deep disagreements about the nature of the problem and the appropriate political response to it.

Similarly, the naming of communities as "Hindu" and "Muslim" in the context of Indian politics reflects the construction of communal identity as a primary political category that the colonial census and communal electoral rolls helped to entrench. The alternative naming of political communities in terms of class, region, and specific interests rather than religious community is itself a political act of challenging the communal framework and asserting the primacy of a different mode of political identification.

For Kafi as a scholar who analyzes the politics of community, culture, and class in Bengali intellectual history, the politics of naming is not a merely theoretical concern. It is a dimension of the political practice of intellectual work itself. The choices he makes about how to characterize the texts he analyzes, the movements they represent, and the social groups they address reflect specific political evaluations that are themselves interventions in the ongoing struggle over the meaning and significance of Bengali literary and cultural history.

5.4 Metaphor and Political Language

The analysis of metaphor as a dimension of political language is an important contribution of the philosophy of language to the understanding of how political rhetoric works, and it is directly relevant to the analysis of the texts that Kafi analyzes. Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol all deploy specific metaphors in the service of their political projects, and understanding how these metaphors work is essential for understanding the political work the texts do.

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's analysis of "conceptual metaphors" in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) argues that human conceptual systems are fundamentally metaphorical: we understand abstract domains of experience in terms of more concrete domains through metaphorical mappings. The metaphor "argument is war" (we attack positions, defend claims, shoot down objections) shapes not only how we talk about argument but how we think about and engage in argument. The metaphor "time is money" (we spend, waste, and save time) shapes how modern societies understand and manage time.

Applied to political language, the analysis of conceptual metaphors reveals how specific political ideologies and movements understand and construct the social world. The metaphor of the body politic, in which the state is understood as a body with different organs performing different functions, naturalizes the hierarchical division of social roles and makes challenges to this hierarchy seem like attacks on the health of the social organism. The metaphor of the nation as a family, in which the state is the parent and citizens are children, naturalizes political authority and makes obedience to authority seem natural and appropriate.

The political texts of Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol deploy their own characteristic metaphors in the service of their political projects. The comet (dhumketu), which is the title and central metaphor of Nazrul's newspaper, is a metaphor of sudden, brilliant, disruptive appearance: the comet blazes across the sky, disrupting the regular order of celestial bodies, and then disappears. The metaphor captures the political character of Nazrul's journalism: it is an intervention that disrupts the ordered discourse of colonial politics, that makes a sudden and brilliant appearance in the political sky, that refuses to be contained within the conventions of respectable political discourse.

The red oleander (raktakarobi) in Tagore's play is a more complex metaphor: it is simultaneously a symbol of beauty, of the natural world that the gold-mining operations threaten to destroy, and of human values that cannot be permanently suppressed by social power. The metaphor works by identifying the qualities of the flower (its vivid color, its persistence in growing back after being cut, its associations with both beauty and danger) with the values it symbolizes (the persistence of human desire for beauty and freedom in the face of systematic dehumanization).

The plough (langol) in the revolutionary journal is a metaphor of productive labor and peasant agency: it identifies the peasant, through the instrument of their labor, as the fundamental productive force of society, the source of the material sustenance on which all social life depends. The metaphor challenges the ideological invisibility of agricultural labor in the dominant culture and asserts the political centrality of the peasant in any genuinely transformative political project.

CHAPTER SIX: LANGUAGE, POWER, AND EPISTEMIC AUTHORITY

6.1 Foucault, Discourse, and the Production of Truth

Michel Foucault's analysis of the relationship between knowledge, power, and discourse has been enormously influential in the humanities and social sciences, and it provides important insights for understanding the politics of intellectual authority in the specific context of Bengali academic life. Foucault's contribution is not primarily a theory of language in the technical philosophical sense but an analysis of how specific discursive practices, specific ways of organizing and producing knowledge, are connected to specific forms of social power.

Foucault's central insight, developed most fully in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality* (1976), is that knowledge and power are not separate: power produces knowledge, and knowledge produces power. Specific forms of knowledge, specific ways of classifying and understanding social reality, are inseparable from specific power relations. The medical gaze that classifies bodies as healthy or sick, the psychiatric discourse that classifies minds as normal or deviant, the colonial anthropology that classifies cultures as civilized or primitive: each of these forms of knowledge is not merely descriptive but normative, not merely observing reality but producing it in a specific form that serves specific power interests.

The application of Foucault's analysis to the academic institution, and specifically to the institution of literary studies, reveals how the academic discourse of literary criticism, with its conventions of canonical authority, its standards of scholarly credibility, and its forms of institutional recognition, is itself a form of power/knowledge that produces specific effects on the texts it studies and the intellectual subjects it forms.

The Foucauldian analysis is relevant to understanding how the dominant academic discourse of Bengali literary studies has produced specific understandings of the Bengali literary tradition that serve specific cultural and political interests. The emphasis on Tagore as the universal humanist, the downplaying of the political and social dimensions of Bengali literature, the exclusion of explicitly Marxian and communist cultural production from the category of legitimate literary scholarship: all of these are not neutral scholarly judgments but reflect the specific power interests of the dominant discourse.

Kafi's scholarly intervention, his insistence on reading Tagore's political and social critique alongside the explicitly political journalism of Dhumketu and the revolutionary poetry of Langol, is from a Foucauldian perspective a challenge to the dominant discourse of Bengali literary studies, a refusal of the power/knowledge regime that has constructed Bengali literary culture in its current canonical form.

6.2 Epistemic Authority and Its Challenges

The question of epistemic authority, of who has the right to speak and be taken seriously as a knower, is one of the most fundamental political questions in the sociology of knowledge. In the

context of Indian academic life, the question of epistemic authority is shaped by intersecting hierarchies of caste, class, gender, religion, language, and institutional affiliation.

The dominance of upper-caste, English-educated men in Indian academic life has been extensively documented, and its consequences for the kind of knowledge that is produced and recognized as authoritative are significant. The systematic exclusion of Dalit scholars from positions of epistemic authority, the marginalization of women's voices in academic discourse, the devaluation of knowledge produced in vernacular languages: all of these reflect the operation of social hierarchies within the supposedly neutral space of academic knowledge production.

For Abdul Kafi as a Muslim scholar working in the Bengali department of an Indian university, the question of epistemic authority has specific dimensions. The implicit assumption that the most authoritative interpreters of the Bengali literary tradition are upper-caste Hindu scholars, an assumption that has historically shaped the dominant tradition of Bengali literary criticism, is challenged by Kafi's very presence in the department and by the specific scholarly perspective he brings to his work. His reading of the Bengali tradition through the lens of a Muslim Bengali intellectual, attentive to the communal dimensions of the texts he analyzes and to the ways in which the tradition has been shaped by the encounter between Hindu and Muslim cultural politics, is a genuinely distinctive contribution to the scholarship.

The challenge to epistemic authority in the academic context takes specific forms. The development of alternative scholarly networks and forums, including the Centre for Marxian Studies, creates institutional space for forms of knowledge production that are marginalized in the dominant academic discourse. The publication of scholarly work in Bengali, rather than exclusively in English, challenges the linguistic hierarchy that privileges English-language scholarship. And the engagement with the intellectual traditions of the global South, through the Centre's connections with scholars from Africa, Latin America, and other regions, challenges the disciplinary hierarchy that privileges the theoretical frameworks developed in the metropolitan centers of academic production.

6.3 The Public Intellectual and the Politics of Expertise

The relationship between scholarly expertise and public intellectual engagement is a contested question in the sociology of knowledge, and it is directly relevant to understanding Kafi's role as both a scholar and a public intellectual. The dominant model of academic expertise involves a strict separation between the production of specialized knowledge within the academy and the communication of simplified versions of that knowledge to general audiences. The public intellectual, on this model, is primarily a popularizer, translating academic knowledge for non-specialist audiences.

But this model of the public intellectual is inadequate and indeed misleading. The most significant public intellectuals are not popularizers but genuine contributors to public discourse: figures who bring genuine intellectual depth and analytical rigor to bear on questions of public concern, who challenge the dominant frameworks of public understanding, and who help to develop the critical capacities of the public audience. The tradition of the Bengali *bhadralok* public intellectual, stretching from Bankimchandra through Tagore to contemporary figures,

represents a model of intellectual engagement in which the boundary between academic scholarship and public discourse is deliberately blurred in the service of cultural and political transformation.

The model of the organic intellectual that Gramsci developed, which we have already discussed, is directly relevant here. The organic intellectual, in Gramsci's sense, is not an academic who occasionally writes for popular audiences but a figure whose intellectual work is genuinely connected to specific social struggles and whose scholarly expertise is developed in the context of and in the service of those struggles. The challenge of maintaining this model of the organic intellectual in the context of an academic institution that increasingly rewards publication in specialist journals over engagement with public audiences is one of the structural tensions that scholars like Kafi must navigate.

6.4 Language Ideology and the Politics of Standardization

Language ideology, the set of beliefs and assumptions about language that circulate in a given society and shape the ways in which language is valued, used, and regulated, is a concept developed in linguistic anthropology that has significant relevance to the understanding of the politics of Bengali in contemporary India.

The ideology of linguistic standardization, the belief that each language has a single correct standard form that is superior to all dialects and regional varieties, is deeply embedded in modern language politics. Standard Bengali, based on the literary language of Calcutta and its surroundings, has been promoted through the education system, the media, and cultural institutions as the authoritative form of the language, while the many regional dialects and varieties of Bengali spoken across West Bengal, Bangladesh, and the Bengali diaspora have been treated as inferior or incorrect forms of the standard.

This ideology of standardization has political consequences. It tends to devalue the linguistic practices of rural and working-class communities, who often speak regional varieties of Bengali that differ significantly from the standard, while privileging the linguistic practices of the educated urban middle class that has produced and consumed the standard literary language. It also tends to create a hierarchy between the Bengali of West Bengal and the Bengali of Bangladesh, with implications for the recognition and valuation of Bangladeshi literary and intellectual production.

The Marxian analysis of language ideology emphasizes its class dimensions: the ideology of linguistic standardization is not merely a matter of aesthetic preference but serves the interests of the social groups whose linguistic practices have been selected as the standard, reinforcing their cultural authority and marginalizing the linguistic practices of subordinate groups. The challenge to this ideology, through the recognition of linguistic diversity, the development of literature in regional varieties of Bengali, and the insistence on the equal value of the Bengali of Bangladesh, is itself a political act with implications for the redistribution of cultural authority.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO BENGALI THOUGHT

7.1 New Materialism and the Critique of Linguistic Idealism

One of the most significant philosophical developments of the early twenty-first century is the emergence of what has been called "new materialism," a set of philosophical positions that challenge the "linguistic turn" in the humanities and social sciences, insisting that material reality, including biological and physical processes, cannot be adequately understood through the exclusive analysis of language, discourse, and representation.

The "linguistic turn," associated with the influence of poststructuralism and deconstruction on the humanities from the 1970s onward, tended toward the position that there is no access to reality independent of linguistic representation: that what we call "reality" is always already constituted through the categories and structures of the language through which we think and communicate. This position, while it captured important insights about the ways in which language shapes our understanding of reality, tended toward a kind of linguistic idealism that critics argued was unable to account for the ways in which material processes, including biological processes, physical events, and economic structures, shape human life in ways that are not reducible to their linguistic representations.

The new materialism, associated with figures like Karen Barad, Rosi Braidotti, and Jane Bennett, argues for a more adequate account of the relationship between language and materiality: one that acknowledges the constitutive role of discourse without reducing reality to discourse, and that attends to the ways in which material processes, including non-human agencies, shape social and cultural life in ways that are not fully captured by the analysis of language and representation.

From the perspective of Marxian theory, the new materialism has an ambiguous status. On one hand, it shares with Marxism the insistence that material processes cannot be dissolved into their linguistic representations, and that the analysis of social life must attend to the economic, biological, and physical dimensions of human existence and not only to their cultural and discursive forms. On the other hand, the new materialism tends to dissolve the specifically social and historical character of material processes in a generalized "vitalism" or "posthumanism" that loses the specifically Marxian insight about the historically specific character of capitalist social formations.

The engagement of the Centre for Marxian Studies with the new materialism has been critical but attentive: it takes seriously the challenge to linguistic idealism while insisting on the continuing importance of the Marxian analysis of historically specific social formations and class relations.

7.2 Speculative Realism and the Question of Ontology

The philosophical movement known as "speculative realism," which emerged from a 2007 workshop at Goldsmiths College in London and includes figures like Quentin Meillassoux,

Graham Harman, Ray Brassier, and Iain Hamilton Grant, has generated significant intellectual excitement in recent years through its challenge to what Meillassoux called "correlationism," the dominant post-Kantian philosophical assumption that there is no access to reality independent of its relationship to the knowing subject.

Speculative realism argues, against the correlationist tradition, that philosophy must be able to think reality as it exists independently of any subject of cognition, and that the failure to do so results in a philosophical anthropocentrism that is intellectually unjustifiable and practically limiting. Meillassoux's *After Finitude* (2006) argues that mathematics provides access to a dimension of reality, "the great outdoors," that is genuinely independent of any cognitive subject, and that this opens the way to a new form of scientific realism that can engage with the physical world as it existed before the emergence of any consciousness.

The relevance of speculative realism to the concerns of Marxian cultural scholarship may not be immediately obvious, and the new ontological philosophy has indeed been criticized for its detachment from the political and historical concerns that define the Marxian tradition. But there is a more indirect relevance: the challenge to anthropocentrism that speculative realism mounts has implications for the ecological dimensions of Marxian political economy, supporting the argument that the analysis of capitalist production must attend to the ways in which it transforms material processes that are not merely "social" in the narrow sense but involve the metabolism of the entire natural world.

7.3 Critical Realism and the Explanation of Social Structures

Critical realism, the philosophical position associated primarily with Roy Bhaskar and developed in a range of social scientific applications by scholars including Andrew Sayer, Margaret Archer, and Bob Jessop, offers a framework for the philosophy of social science that is broadly compatible with the Marxian approach while also providing important clarifications and developments.

Bhaskar's critical realism argues that social reality is "stratified": it consists of real structures, mechanisms, and tendencies that generate observable events but that are not themselves directly observable. The task of social science is to develop explanations that identify the underlying structures and mechanisms that generate the events and patterns we observe, rather than merely describing or predicting observable regularities. This "depth realism" is directly compatible with the Marxian analysis of the structures of the capitalist mode of production that generate the observable phenomena of class inequality, exploitation, and crisis.

The critical realist framework has been particularly useful in the analysis of the relationship between structure and agency in social life, a question that is central to Marxian political theory and that has generated some of its most important internal debates. Critical realism argues that social structures are real but not deterministic: they shape and constrain the actions of social agents but do not determine them. Social agents, through their actions, also reproduce and transform the social structures they inhabit. This "transformational model of social action," as Bhaskar calls it, provides a framework for understanding how social change is possible without

reducing it either to the autonomous action of free individual subjects or to the mechanical unfolding of structural laws.

The application of critical realist philosophy to the specific questions of cultural analysis and literary history that Kafi's work addresses is a relatively underdeveloped area, but it has significant potential. The concept of the "literary mechanism," the specific formal and rhetorical resources that a text deploys to produce its effects on readers, might be developed along critical realist lines: understanding literary texts not as passive reflections of social structures but as active interventions that draw on and transform specific literary mechanisms in the service of specific political and cultural projects.

7.4 Analytic Philosophy of Language: Recent Developments

The analytic philosophy of language has continued to develop in significant ways in the early twenty-first century, and several of these developments are relevant to the understanding of the philosophical questions at stake in the study of Bengali literary and intellectual culture.

The development of "experimental philosophy," which uses empirical methods from cognitive science and social psychology to test philosophical claims about ordinary language use and intuition, has generated significant insights about the ways in which cultural context shapes linguistic intuitions and concepts. Studies in experimental philosophy have found significant cross-cultural variation in intuitions about reference, knowledge, and moral concepts, which supports the broadly Whorfian view that linguistic and cultural context shapes cognitive processes in ways that the traditional analytic assumption of universal human rationality cannot fully accommodate.

The development of "social epistemology," associated with figures like Alvin Goldman, Miranda Fricker, and Lorraine Code, has brought the social dimensions of knowledge production and distribution to the center of epistemological analysis. Social epistemology attends to the ways in which the social organization of inquiry, including the institutions of academic knowledge production, the media, and the broader public sphere, shapes what knowledge is produced, how it is evaluated, and who has access to it. This framework is directly relevant to the analysis of the politics of knowledge production in the Bengali academic context.

The concept of "testimony" in analytic epistemology, the question of under what conditions we are justified in believing what others tell us, has recently been developed in ways that connect to the political dimensions of epistemic authority. The question of why some testimonial sources are more readily believed than others, and how social factors including race, class, gender, and linguistic identity shape the credibility attributed to different speakers, connects directly to the questions of epistemic injustice and authority that we have been analyzing throughout this chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHT: LANGUAGE, SILENCE, AND THE UNSPEAKABLE

8.1 What Cannot Be Said

The limits of language, the boundary between what can be expressed and what can only be gestured at or shown, is a theme that has exercised philosophers from Wittgenstein to Derrida and that has particular significance for the understanding of literary language and its relationship to extreme experience.

Wittgenstein's famous closing sentence of the *Tractatus*, "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent," was intended as a demarcation of the limits of what language can meaningfully say. For the early Wittgenstein, the world is the totality of facts, and language pictures these facts. What lies beyond the domain of facts, including the mystical, the ethical, and the aesthetic, cannot be stated but can perhaps be shown. The silence at the limits of language is not the silence of intellectual failure but the silence of what transcends the conditions of meaningful statement.

This Wittgensteinian theme has been developed in the context of literary theory in various directions. George Steiner's *Language and Silence* (1967) argued that the atrocities of the Holocaust had placed the very capacity of language for moral meaning under threat: the language of humanism had been used to justify mass murder, and the silence of the survivor in the face of the experience of the death camps was not the silence of intellectual failure but the silence of what transcends the capacity of ordinary language to express.

The literature of partition in Bengal addresses a comparable problem: how does one speak of experiences of mass violence, communal murder, and displacement that seem to exceed the capacity of ordinary language to convey? The partition literature of Bengal, including works by Manik Bandyopadhyay, Ritwik Ghatak, and many others, develops specific literary strategies for approaching these limits: the use of fragmentary forms, of ellipsis and silence, of metaphor and indirection, to convey what direct statement cannot adequately express.

The analysis of these strategies, and the theoretical questions they raise about the relationship between extreme experience and the capacity of language to represent it, is an important dimension of the study of Bengali literature that connects to broader debates in trauma theory, the ethics of testimony, and the philosophy of language. The recent development of "trauma theory" in literary studies, associated with figures like Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Dori Laub, has provided conceptual tools for analyzing the specific ways in which traumatic experience resists narrative representation while generating specific literary forms for its partial articulation.

8.2 The Silence of the Marginalized: Subaltern Studies and Its Limits

The question of who can speak, and whose speech is recognized as meaningful, is one of the central concerns of the Subaltern Studies tradition, the group of historians associated with Ranajit Guha who sought to recover the perspectives of the marginalized from the colonial and nationalist archive. Spivak's famous question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", posed in her essay of that title (1988), challenges both the Subaltern Studies historians' claim to be recovering subaltern voices and the broader assumption that the marginalized have voices that can be straightforwardly recovered through historical research.

Spivak's argument is subtle and has often been misread. She is not arguing that the subaltern simply cannot speak. She is arguing that the conditions under which subaltern speech can be recognized as speech, can be heard and taken seriously as a claim about social reality, are conditions that the subaltern is systematically excluded from. The peasant woman who tries to assert her autonomy within the colonial and nationalist frameworks available to her finds that these frameworks do not recognize her assertion as an assertion: she is heard, if she is heard at all, through the distorting filters of colonial administration, nationalist ideology, and family patriarchy.

The critique of the Subaltern Studies project from a Marxian perspective has been pursued most systematically by Vivek Chibber, whose *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* argues that the Subaltern Studies historians' claim to be recovering a distinctively non-Western form of political agency is based on a misreading of European history and a romanticization of peasant resistance. Chibber argues that the forms of political agency found in Indian subaltern politics are not fundamentally different from those found in European working-class and peasant politics, and that the claim to their irreducible difference reflects an Orientalist essentialism that the Subaltern Studies project shares with the colonial anthropology it seeks to challenge.

The engagement of the Centre for Marxian Studies with this debate has been important for the development of a Marxian approach to Indian history and culture that takes seriously both the class dimensions of subaltern politics and the specific cultural and historical forms that subaltern resistance takes in the Indian context.

8.3 Poetry and the Inarticulate: Celan, Nazrul, and the Limits of Expression

The comparison of Paul Celan, the Romanian-German poet who survived the Holocaust and whose poetry represents one of the most extraordinary attempts in any language to find words for the limits of human experience, with Kazi Nazrul Islam, the Bengali rebel poet whose work represents a different kind of engagement with the limits of what political language can say, is not an obvious one. But it is a productive one, because both poets are working at the boundary between what language can say and what it can only approach.

Celan's poetry, written in German after the Holocaust, is marked by a radical compression and condensation that reflects the extremity of the experience it is approaching: a language so stripped of conventional ornament and familiar reference that it is almost opaque, a language that earns its claim to speak about the unspeakable precisely through its willingness to approach the limits of meaningful statement. The "death fugue," his most famous poem, achieves its extraordinary power through the formal tension between the musical fugue structure and the content of mass murder: form and content are in a relationship of unbearable irony that communicates what neither alone could convey.

Nazrul Islam's poetry is formally very different from Celan's. It is characterized by passionate directness, by a rhetoric of incitement and challenge that uses the full resources of Bengali poetic tradition, including classical forms, folk rhythms, and the traditions of Islamic devotional poetry, to communicate a sense of urgency and aspiration that conventional political discourse cannot contain. But Nazrul too is working at the limits of what political language can say: the kind of

total commitment to justice and liberation that his poetry demands goes beyond what any ordinary political program can deliver, and the power of the poetry lies precisely in this excess over any particular political formulation.

The comparison illuminates both poets: it shows how different formal strategies, Celan's compression and Nazrul's expansion, can both be understood as responses to the pressure of experience that exceeds the capacity of ordinary language, and it raises the question of what the relationship is between formal choices and the specific character of the experience being approached.

CHAPTER NINE: SEMIOTICS, SIGNIFICATION, AND THE POLITICS OF THE SIGN

9.1 Semiotics and Its Founders

Semiotics, the study of signs and signification, is one of the most interdisciplinary of the fields that contribute to the analysis of language and culture. Its founding figures worked in very different contexts, with very different methods, but arrived at compatible insights about the fundamental role of sign processes in human social and cultural life.

Charles Sanders Peirce, the American philosopher and logician whose work on semiotics was produced in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth, developed the most technically sophisticated account of sign processes in the tradition. Peirce distinguished between three types of signs based on the nature of the relationship between the sign and what it signifies: the icon (which signifies through resemblance), the index (which signifies through a causal or existential connection), and the symbol (which signifies through a conventional relationship established by social practice). This trichotomy has been enormously productive in the analysis of different kinds of signifying practices, from language to music to visual art.

Ferdinand de Saussure, whose structural linguistics we have already discussed, developed a different but complementary account of the sign, focused primarily on the arbitrary, conventional character of the linguistic sign and on the structural relationships between signs within a language system. The Saussurean tradition, developed by subsequent theorists including Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, and A.J. Greimas, has been particularly influential in literary theory and cultural studies.

The most important development of semiotics for the analysis of the kind of politically engaged literary culture that Kafi's work addresses is probably Roland Barthes's analysis of myth and ideology in *Mythologies* (1957) and the theoretical essay "Myth Today" that concludes it. Barthes argues that myth is a form of secondary signification: it takes a primary sign, a word or image that already has a specific meaning, and uses it as the signifier for a new, ideological meaning. The effect of myth is to naturalize ideology, to make historically contingent social arrangements seem natural and inevitable by presenting them in the form of primary, unquestionable facts.

The analysis of how the Bengali literary canon has been constructed through the operation of myth in Barthes's sense is directly relevant to Kafi's critical project. The "myth of Tagore" as the universal humanist, the timeless expression of Bengali spiritual values, is precisely a mythological construction in Barthes's sense: it takes the primary historical fact of Tagore's literary achievement and transforms it into an ideological naturalization of a specific class-based construction of Bengali cultural identity.

9.2 The Symbol and the Allegorical Impulse in Bengali Literature

The tradition of symbolic and allegorical writing in Bengali literature is extraordinarily rich, and its analysis requires engagement with both the Western philosophical tradition of symbolic theory and the specifically Bengali and Sanskrit traditions of poetic signification.

The symbol, in the Western Romantic and post-Romantic tradition, is typically distinguished from the allegory by its "natural" or "organic" character: the symbol is supposed to participate in the reality it represents, to embody rather than merely to represent, while the allegory is understood as a more mechanical substitution of one thing for another. This distinction, associated particularly with Coleridge and with the German Romantic tradition, has been enormously influential in literary theory, tending to privilege the symbol over the allegory as a higher form of literary signification.

Walter Benjamin's challenge to this tradition, developed in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928), argues against the Romantic privileging of the symbol and for a rehabilitation of allegory as a form of literary signification that is more honest about its own constructed, historical character. Allegory, for Benjamin, does not pretend to the organic totality of the symbol but openly displays its own fragmentary, historically determined character. The ruins and fragments of allegorical representation are more truthful than the false totality of the symbol, because they do not conceal the historical conditions of their production.

The analysis of Tagore's use of the red oleander in *Raktakarobi* from this perspective is illuminating. The oleander is, on one reading, a symbol in the Romantic sense: it participates in the values it represents, it embodies the persistence of human aspiration rather than merely pointing to it. But on another reading, in light of Benjamin's analysis, the oleander is better understood as allegorical: it does not represent a natural organic totality but a historically specific aspiration, the aspiration for human values in the specific historical context of early twentieth-century capitalist development in India, and its power lies precisely in this historical specificity rather than in any pretension to timeless symbolic resonance.

9.3 Political Semiotics: How Signs Become Weapons

The analysis of how signs, including literary signs, function as political weapons is one of the most important applications of semiotics to the study of culture, and it is directly relevant to the understanding of the three texts that Kafi analyzes.

Every political movement needs to develop its own semiotic resources: its symbols, its slogans, its images, its narratives, through which it constructs an identity, communicates its claims, and

mobilizes its supporters. The colonial nationalist movement in Bengal developed a rich semiotic repertoire that drew on both the traditions of Hindu iconography and the conventions of European print culture to construct a specifically Bengali nationalist identity. The progressive movement of the 1920s and 1930s developed its own semiotic resources that challenged the class and communal limitations of the nationalist semiotic tradition.

Dhumketu's semiotic strategies include the title itself (the comet as a metaphor of disruptive political intervention), the specific rhetorical forms of its editorials (drawing on both the traditions of Islamic sermons and the conventions of modern journalism), and the specific cultural references it invokes (to the traditions of Islamic revolutionary poetry, to the history of Bengali cultural resistance, and to the contemporary anti-colonial struggle). Each of these semiotic choices reflects specific assessments of the audience the paper is addressing and the specific political effects it is aiming to produce.

Langol's semiotic resources are similarly complex: the plough as a central symbol, the use of accessible vernacular Bengali, the specific imagery of rural labor, the invocation of the tradition of progressive song and poetry. These resources are carefully calibrated to address a specific audience, the Bengali peasant and working class, and to produce specific political effects: the development of class consciousness, the cultivation of solidarity, and the organization of political resistance.

The analysis of these semiotic strategies, drawing on the full resources of semiotics and the philosophy of language, is one of the most productive dimensions of the kind of Marxian literary analysis that Kafi's work exemplifies.

CHAPTER TEN: LANGUAGE PHILOSOPHY, JURISPRUDENCE, AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL DIMENSION

10.1 Constitutional Language and Its Interpretation

The Indian Constitution is one of the most linguistically rich and philosophically significant constitutional documents in the world, and its interpretation raises profound questions about the relationship between language, meaning, and political authority that are directly relevant to the concerns of this Part.

The Constitution was drafted primarily in English, under the influence of B.R. Ambedkar, who served as the chairman of the drafting committee, with the explicit intention of establishing a secular, democratic republic based on principles of equality, liberty, and justice. The linguistic choices of the Constitutional text reflect specific philosophical commitments: the choice to include "socialist" and "secular" in the Preamble (through the 42nd Amendment in 1976), the specific formulation of fundamental rights, the linguistic structure of the directive principles: all of these reflect debates about the meaning and significance of specific political concepts that are inseparable from questions about language and interpretation.

The interpretation of the Constitution by the Supreme Court of India has been a major site of debate about legal hermeneutics, about the proper methodology for interpreting a constitutional text. The debate between "originalist" interpretation, which argues that constitutional provisions should be understood in terms of the original intentions of the framers, and "living Constitution" interpretation, which argues that constitutional provisions should be interpreted in the light of evolving social values and understandings, is a debate that directly involves the philosophy of language: it raises the question of whether the meaning of a text is fixed by the intentions of its authors or whether it evolves through its use in new contexts.

The relevance of this debate to the concerns of Bengali Marxian scholarship is significant. The constitutional framework within which Indian academic life operates, including the constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression, freedom of association, and the right to education, provides the legal basis for the kind of politically engaged scholarly work represented by the Centre for Marxian Studies. The erosion of these constitutional guarantees through the use of sedition laws, anti-terror legislation, and political interference in university governance is not merely a political problem but a linguistic one: it involves the contestation of the meaning of key constitutional concepts, including freedom of expression, public order, and national security.

10.2 Language Rights and the Politics of Minority Protection

The question of language rights, the legal protection of the rights of linguistic minorities to use their own language in public life, in education, and in dealings with the state, is a dimension of the broader politics of language that connects the philosophy of language to constitutional and legal theory.

The Indian Constitution recognizes specific language rights for linguistic minorities, including the right to establish and maintain educational institutions of their choice (Article 30) and the right to conserve a distinct language, script, or culture (Article 29). These rights reflect an understanding that language is not merely a means of communication but a constitutive dimension of cultural identity, and that the protection of linguistic minorities requires specific legal guarantees.

The application of these constitutional provisions to the specific situation of the Bengali-speaking community in West Bengal, and to the broader question of the relationship between Bengali, Hindi, and English in the linguistic landscape of India, raises complex questions that are both philosophical and political. The dominant position of Hindi in national public life, the growing pressure to use Hindi in central government communications and in national educational standards, and the political implications of the BJP's cultural nationalism for linguistic diversity in India: all of these developments require engagement with the legal framework of language rights and with the philosophical questions about language, identity, and political authority that frame it.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS TO PART FOUR: LANGUAGE AS A POLITICAL HORIZON

Throughout the twelve chapters of this Part, we have traced the philosophy of language from its foundations in the Western and Indian philosophical traditions, through the politics of translation and the archive of Bengali thought, to the specific semiotic, hermeneutic, and political dimensions of the language questions that bear on Abdul Kafi's intellectual work and on the tradition of Bengali Marxian scholarship that he represents.

The central argument that has run through this Part can be stated as follows: language is not a neutral medium for the transmission of pre-formed thought but a constitutive dimension of human social life, shaped by history, power, and the specific practices of specific communities, and therefore a fundamental site of political contest. The choice of what language to write in, how to deploy the specific resources of a language, what texts to attend to and what to leave in the archive's shadows, how to translate across linguistic and cultural boundaries: all of these are political acts, not merely technical or aesthetic ones.

For Abdul Kafi, whose intellectual work involves the deployment of Bengali linguistic resources in the service of a Marxian analysis of Bengali literary and cultural history, these questions are not merely theoretical. They structure his every scholarly act. The decision to write in Bengali, to publish with the National Book Agency, to analyze texts like *Dhumketu* and *Langol* alongside *Raktakarobi*: all of these are decisions about language as a political horizon, decisions about which community of readers to address, which tradition to work within and extend, and what kind of Bengali intellectual culture to contribute to developing.

The tradition of Bengali intellectual life that Kafi embodies, and that the Centre for Marxian Studies sustains, is a tradition that has always understood language in this way: as both a medium and a site of political struggle, as both the tool through which the world is understood and the arena in which the contest over whose understanding will prevail is decided. The philosophy of language, in this tradition, is not a technical subdiscipline of academic philosophy but a dimension of the fundamental political question of who speaks, and who is heard, and who has the power to determine what counts as knowledge and what counts as silence.

This understanding of language as a political horizon connects Part Four to the broader concerns of this textbook as a whole. The analysis of Abdul Kafi's intellectual work requires attending not only to its content, its specific claims about the three texts and the tradition they represent, but to its form: the specific language in which it is written, the specific institution within which it is produced, the specific community of readers it addresses, and the specific political tradition to which it contributes. Understanding this formal dimension is essential for understanding the full significance of the work, and it is the contribution of the philosophy of language, developed across the chapters of this Part, to make that formal dimension legible.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Analyze the relevance of Saussure's concept of the "arbitrary sign" for the understanding of the political dimensions of literary symbolism, using specific examples from *Dhumketu*, *Raktakarobi*, and *Langol*.

2. How does Gadamer's concept of the "fusion of horizons" apply to the practice of historical literary criticism? What are the epistemological and political implications of this concept for the kind of Marxian literary scholarship that Kafi's work exemplifies?
3. Compare the Sanskrit theory of dhvani with the Western Romantic theory of the symbol as frameworks for understanding the significance of Tagore's use of the red oleander in Raktakarobi. What does the comparison reveal about the specific cultural resources that Tagore draws on?
4. Analyze the colonial politics of translation using specific examples from the Orientalist tradition of Sanskrit and Bengali textual translation. What specific ideological effects did these translations produce, and how were they contested?
5. Apply Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia to the analysis of Dhumketu as a political newspaper. What different social voices does the paper incorporate, and how does the tension between them shape its political meaning?
6. Evaluate the concept of "epistemic injustice" (Fricker) as a framework for understanding the structural disadvantage faced by Bengali-language scholarship in the global academic market. What institutional and political responses does this analysis suggest?
7. How does the Foucauldian analysis of discourse and power/knowledge apply to the history of Bengali literary canon formation? What specific power interests have shaped the canonical hierarchy, and how has this been challenged?
8. Compare Benjamin's "Task of the Translator" with Spivak's "Politics of Translation" as frameworks for understanding the challenges of translating Bengali Marxian scholarship for international audiences. What do these frameworks suggest about the appropriate strategies for translation?
9. Analyze the concept of language rights in the Indian constitutional framework in relation to the broader question of the politics of linguistic diversity in India. What legal and philosophical resources are available for the defense of linguistic rights against the pressures of Hindi imposition?
10. How does the distinction between "symbol" and "allegory" (Benjamin) apply to the analysis of the literary devices used in Raktakarobi, Dhumketu, and Langol? Which of these conceptual frameworks is more adequate for understanding the specific literary-political work of each text?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

On the philosophy of language (Western tradition): Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, available in various English translations, is the essential text. Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* provides the foundational text of philosophical hermeneutics. Paul Ricoeur's *The Rule of Metaphor and Interpretation Theory* provide accessible introductions to his philosophy of language and interpretation. John Searle's *Speech Acts* provides an accessible introduction to the speech act tradition.

On the philosophy of language (Indian tradition): Bimal Krishna Matilal's *The Word and the World* provides a scholarly but accessible introduction to the Indian philosophical tradition of linguistic analysis. George Cardona's *Panini: A Survey of Research* provides an authoritative

account of the grammatical tradition. Hajime Nakamura's *A History of Early Vedanta Philosophy* provides the broader philosophical context.

On translation theory: Lawrence Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility* provides an essential introduction to translation theory and the politics of domestication. Walter Benjamin's essay "The Task of the Translator," available in *Illuminations*, is the essential primary text. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "The Politics of Translation," available in *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, provides the postcolonial perspective. Tejaswini Niranjana's *Siting Translation* provides a systematic historical and theoretical analysis.

On semiotics and cultural analysis: Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* provides an essential and accessible introduction to the semiotics of everyday culture. Umberto Eco's *A Theory of Semiotics* provides the most systematic modern account. Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory* provides an accessible survey of the field including its semiotic dimensions.

On the archive and colonial knowledge: Ann Laura Stoler's *Along the Archival Grain* provides an essential account of the colonial archive and its politics. Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* provides a sophisticated postcolonial challenge to the Eurocentrism of historical analysis. Ranajit Guha's *Dominance Without Hegemony* provides the most systematic Marxian-influenced analysis of colonial power in India.

On Bengali linguistic and literary culture: Sukumar Sen's *History of Bengali Literature* provides the standard scholarly account of the tradition. Clinton Seely's *A Poet Apart: A Literary Biography of the Bengali Poet Jibanananda Das* provides an example of sophisticated literary-historical scholarship on a major Bengali poet. The journal *Bengal: Past and Present* provides access to a range of historical and cultural scholarship on Bengali culture.

End of Part Four

This textbook continues with Part Five: Dialectics of Tradition and Modernity: Bengali Literature from Bankimchandra to the Present.

APPENDIX TO PART FOUR: GLOSSARY OF KEY LINGUISTIC AND SEMIOTIC CONCEPTS

Allegory: A mode of literary representation in which characters, events, or settings represent abstract ideas or historical situations through extended metaphorical substitution. Distinguished from the symbol by its more explicit and mechanical character. Benjamin's rehabilitation of allegory against the Romantic privileging of the symbol is a significant moment in the philosophy of literary form.

Archive (Foucauldian): Not merely the collection of preserved documents but the system of rules that determines what can be said, what counts as a meaningful statement, and what is excluded from the domain of legitimate discourse in any given historical period.

Arbitrariness of the Sign: Saussure's principle that the relationship between the signifier (sound-image or written form) and the signified (concept) in a linguistic sign is not natural or motivated but conventional, established by social practice.

Conceptual Metaphor: Lakoff and Johnson's term for the fundamental cognitive metaphors that structure our understanding of abstract domains in terms of more concrete domains. Examples include "argument is war" and "time is money."

Corpus: The body of texts produced in a specific language, literary tradition, or author's work that is the object of textual and linguistic analysis.

Dialogism: Bakhtin's term for the fundamental property of language utterances as responses to prior utterances and anticipations of future responses. Every utterance is "dialogic" in the sense that it is oriented toward an addressee and shaped by the social voices it incorporates and responds to.

Dhvani: The Sanskrit term for "suggestion" or "resonance" in poetic language, referring to the indirect communication of meanings through implication rather than direct statement. The theory of dhvani was developed by Anandavardhana and further elaborated by Abhinavagupta.

Discourse: In Foucauldian usage, the systematically organized ways of speaking, writing, and thinking about a particular domain that are governed by specific rules about what counts as a legitimate statement and what does not.

Fusion of Horizons: Gadamer's term for the process through which understanding is achieved in interpretation: the bringing together of the "horizon" of the interpreter (shaped by their specific historical situation and presuppositions) and the "horizon" of the text (shaped by the specific historical context of its production).

Heteroglossia: Bakhtin's term for the presence of multiple social languages within a single text or utterance. The novel, for Bakhtin, is the literary form most characterized by heteroglossia, incorporating a multiplicity of social voices in productive tension.

Icon: One of Peirce's three types of signs; an icon signifies through resemblance to what it represents. Examples include portraits, maps, and onomatopoeic words.

Index: One of Peirce's three types of signs; an index signifies through a causal or existential connection with what it represents. Examples include smoke as a sign of fire, a symptom as a sign of a disease.

Langue: Saussure's term for the abstract system of language, the set of rules and conventions that govern linguistic communication in a given community, as distinguished from parole (individual acts of speaking or writing).

Language Game: Wittgenstein's term for a specific form of language use embedded in a specific social practice or activity. The meaning of words is determined by their use in specific language games, not by their reference to objects or their expression of mental states.

Myth (Barthes): A form of secondary signification that takes a primary sign and uses it as the signifier for an ideological meaning. Myth naturalizes ideology by presenting historical contingencies as natural facts.

Parole: Saussure's term for individual acts of speaking or writing, as distinguished from langue (the abstract system of language).

Semiotics: The study of signs and signification in all its forms, including linguistic, visual, gestural, and cultural sign systems. The term is associated primarily with Peirce (who used "semeiosis") and Saussure (who used "semiology").

Signifier/Signified: Saussure's terms for the two components of the linguistic sign: the signifier is the sound-image or written form, and the signified is the concept or mental content associated with it.

Spkhot: The concept in Bhartrhari's linguistic philosophy referring to the unitary meaning-event through which a sentence is understood as a whole, rather than as the sum of its component parts.

Symbol (Peirce): One of Peirce's three types of signs; a symbol signifies through a conventional relationship established by social practice. Most linguistic signs are symbols in Peirce's sense.

Testimony: In epistemology, the transmission of knowledge through assertion, when a knower relies on what another person tells them. The question of when testimony is reliable, and how social factors shape the credibility attributed to different testimonial sources, is a major concern in social epistemology.

End of Appendix

Part Five of this textbook will address: Dialectics of Tradition and Modernity: Bengali Literature from Bankimchandra to the Present.

PART FIVE: DIALECTICS OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY: BENGALI LITERATURE FROM BANKIMCHANDRA TO THE PRESENT

PREFACE TO PART FIVE

The preceding four parts of this textbook have established the intellectual context, biographical formation, philosophical foundations, and linguistic commitments of Abdul Kafi as a thinker and a teacher. We have traced the history of Jadavpur University and its Bengali Department, analyzed the Centre for Marxian Studies and the tradition of engaged scholarship it represents, examined the Marxian philosophical tradition within which Kafi's intellectual work is situated, and investigated the philosophy of language as it bears on the specific conditions of Bengali literary scholarship. In all of these investigations, we have been circling around a central problem without yet confronting it with the full analytical attention it deserves.

That problem is the relationship between tradition and modernity in Bengali literary culture. It is the fundamental intellectual problem of the world that Abdul Kafi inhabits and works within. It is the problem that his principal texts address, and it is the problem that connects his specific scholarly concerns to the broadest questions of global intellectual history in the modern era. To understand Kafi's work in its full significance, we must understand this problem in its full depth and complexity.

The present Part undertakes that understanding. We do so by tracing a long arc: from Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay in the nineteenth century, through Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam in the early twentieth century, through the Progressive Writers Movement and the literary culture of the 1930s and 1940s, through the partition era and its literary aftermath, to the present moment of neoliberal globalization and its pressures on literary and intellectual culture in Bengal. Throughout this arc, we attend to the specific texts that Abdul Kafi has chosen to analyze, particularly *Dhumketu*, *Raktakarobi*, and *Langol*, as well as to the broader tradition of which these texts form a part. We also attend to the philosophical, economic, political, legal, and psychological dimensions of the questions that this tradition raises, connecting the specific history of Bengali literature to the largest questions of theory, method, and interpretation that animate global intellectual debate in the twenty-first century.

Part Five comprises twelve chapters, each addressing a distinct aspect of the dialectic of tradition and modernity in Bengali literary culture. Taken together, they provide a comprehensive account of the intellectual world within which Abdul Kafi's scholarship operates and from which it draws its significance. They also provide a foundation for the deeper textual analyses that will occupy Parts Six, Seven, and Eight of this textbook, where we will turn to the specific texts of Kafi's own scholarly work and read them with the full analytical apparatus that Parts One through Five have assembled.

CHAPTER ONE: BANKIMCHANDRA CHATTOPADHYAY AND THE INVENTION OF BENGALI MODERNITY

1.1 The Problem of the Beginning

Every intellectual tradition must be understood historically, and understanding it historically means locating a beginning, or at least what appears retrospectively to be a beginning. For Bengali literary modernity, the figure who has most often been identified as a founding figure is Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894). This identification is not arbitrary. Bankimchandra was the first major Bengali novelist, the creator of a form of literary prose that transformed the possibilities of Bengali literary expression, the inaugurator of a tradition of literary nationalism that shaped the entire subsequent history of Bengali cultural politics, and the author of texts that continue to generate controversy, debate, and passionate disagreement more than a hundred years after their composition. To understand why Bengali literary culture is what it is today, in the twenty-first century, and why it raises the problems it does, it is necessary to understand Bankimchandra's contribution and its consequences.

But the identification of Bankimchandra as a beginning is also philosophically problematic. No tradition begins with a single figure. Every writer draws on predecessors, inherits forms and themes, responds to pressures and questions that were already there before any particular individual arrives on the scene. Bankimchandra did not write in a vacuum. He wrote in a Bengal that had already been transformed by the Bengali Renaissance, that had already produced the extraordinary prose of Rammohan Roy and the reformist journalism of Derozio's Young Bengal movement, that had already seen the emergence of a Bengali middle class formed in the encounter between colonial modernity and traditional culture, and that had already begun to develop the specific literary institutions, the journals, the publishing houses, the reading publics, that would make a specifically modern Bengali literature possible.

What Bankimchandra represented was not a beginning out of nothing but a crystallization. He was the figure in whom the accumulated possibilities of his tradition came together in a new and unprecedented synthesis, producing texts that could speak to new questions, address new readers, and generate new possibilities for literary expression and political thought. This is what makes him foundational: not that he created Bengali literary modernity *ex nihilo*, but that he gave it a form that all subsequent Bengali literary culture would have to engage with, whether by extension, critique, or outright rejection.

1.2 Bankim's Dilemma: Colonialism, Hinduism, and the Question of National Identity

The central intellectual dilemma of Bankimchandra's work can be stated simply, even if its implications are enormously complex. He was a Bengali intellectual of the colonial era who felt simultaneously the attraction of Western modernity and the pressure of Hindu tradition, the demand for a national identity and the dissolution of traditional community, the possibility of literary creation and the constraints of political subordination. Out of this dilemma, he constructed a body of work that addressed the problem of national identity with enormous power and creativity but also with consequences that subsequent generations have found profoundly ambivalent.

Bankimchandra's most celebrated and most controversial text is *Anandamath* (1882), a historical novel set in the period of the Sannyasi Rebellion of the late eighteenth century that presents a vision of Hindu nationalist resistance to British colonial rule. The novel contains the famous song *Vande Mataram*, which became one of the central anthems of the Indian nationalist

movement and which has continued to generate controversy into the twenty-first century, most recently in the context of debates about whether Muslim Indians can be required to sing a song that many Muslims interpret as idolatrous in its treatment of the motherland as a goddess. This controversy is not incidental to Bankimchandra's project. It is constitutive of it. Anandamath constructs a vision of the Indian nation that is fundamentally Hindu in its symbolic vocabulary, and this construction has had lasting consequences for the way in which questions of national identity, religious community, and political belonging have been debated in Bengal and in India more broadly.

The philosophical dimensions of Bankimchandra's dilemma are significant and deserve careful attention. He was a thinker who took seriously both the Western philosophical tradition, particularly the tradition of rationalist social theory represented by figures like Comte and Mill, and the Hindu philosophical tradition, particularly the Vedantic emphasis on the unity of consciousness and the Vaishnava devotional tradition with its conception of divine love as a model for human attachment. His attempt to reconcile these two intellectual worlds, to construct a vision of modernity that incorporated rather than rejected the resources of Hindu tradition, was one of the most ambitious intellectual projects of nineteenth-century India. It was also, inevitably, a project that contained internal tensions and contradictions that his texts could not fully resolve.

The specific form that these tensions take in Bankimchandra's work has been analyzed with great sophistication by subsequent literary critics and cultural historians, including Partha Chatterjee, whose influential analysis in "The Nation and Its Fragments" (1993) argues that Bankimchandra's nationalism represents a particularly revealing instance of the way in which anti-colonial nationalism resolves the dilemma of colonial modernity by dividing the social world into an outer domain of politics, economy, and statecraft where Western modernity is accepted, and an inner domain of culture, religion, and family life where a specifically indigenous tradition is preserved and defended. This analysis is important for understanding the broader tradition of Bengali literary nationalism within which Abdul Kafi's scholarly interventions take place, because it shows how the founding moment of Bengali literary modernity was already structured by a set of contradictions that would generate the debates of the following century.

1.3 The Economic Dimensions of Bankimchandra's World

Any adequate analysis of Bankimchandra must attend not only to the philosophical and literary dimensions of his work but to its economic and social foundations. Bankimchandra wrote in a Bengal that was undergoing a profound economic transformation under British colonial rule. The colonial economy had systematically underdeveloped the indigenous textile industry, the most significant traditional industry of Bengal, by flooding the Indian market with cheap British manufactured cloth. It had simultaneously created a new class of Bengali professionals, clerks, lawyers, teachers, and civil servants who owed their livelihoods to colonial institutions but who were excluded from the highest positions of power and authority that those institutions controlled. This class, the *bhadralok*, was Bankimchandra's primary audience and his primary social world.

The relationship between Bankimchandra's literary project and the specific interests and anxieties of the bhadralok is a central concern of the Marxian analysis of Bengali literary history that Abdul Kafi's work contributes to. The bhadralok were a class defined by their education, their cultural refinement, their command of the colonial literary and administrative languages, and their anxiety about their own position in a society transformed by colonialism. They were not peasants, not industrial workers, not zamindars in the traditional sense, and not British colonial officials. They occupied an intermediate and in many ways precarious position, aspiring to a modernity that promised both inclusion and exclusion, both liberation and subordination.

Bankimchandra's novels both reflected and shaped the consciousness of this class. They gave literary form to its aspirations and its anxieties, its vision of a reborn Hindu India and its ambivalent relationship to the colonial modernity that had both created and constrained it. Understanding this class basis of Bankimchandra's literary project is not a reductionist exercise in social determinism. It is rather an essential component of understanding why his texts have the specific form they do, why they raise the specific problems they do, and why they have generated the specific responses they have. A Marxian literary criticism that is adequate to the complexity of Bengali literary history must be able to hold together the analysis of class position and social formation on the one hand and the analysis of specific literary forms, philosophical arguments, and cultural meanings on the other. This holding together is precisely the project that Abdul Kafi's scholarly work represents.

1.4 The Legacy of Bankimchandra: A Problem for Future Generations

The legacy of Bankimchandra for subsequent Bengali literary culture was both generative and troubling. It was generative because he had demonstrated that Bengali literary prose could address the largest questions of national life, philosophical identity, and political possibility with artistic power and intellectual depth. The novel form that he developed, drawing on both indigenous traditions of story-telling and the European novel form as mediated through Bengali translations and adaptations, gave subsequent Bengali writers a model and a resource that they could build on and transform.

But it was also troubling because the specific content of his national vision, its Hindu exclusivism, its construction of Muslim characters and Muslim history as threats to be overcome rather than communities to be included, left a wound in Bengali literary culture that has never fully healed. Muslim Bengali intellectuals, including Abdul Kafi, work in a tradition that they both inherit and must critically engage. They cannot simply ignore Bankimchandra; he is too central to the tradition. But they cannot simply accept his vision of Bengali nationhood, with its implicit and sometimes explicit exclusions. They must find a way to engage with the tradition critically, to take from it what is valuable and transformative while refusing what is exclusionary and damaging. This is not merely a scholarly challenge. It is a deeply personal one, and it connects the intellectual work of literary scholarship to the lived experience of being a Muslim Bengali intellectual in a society still marked by the conflicts and traumas of partition and its aftermath.

CHAPTER TWO: RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND THE AMBIGUITIES OF UNIVERSALISM

2.1 Tagore's Global Significance and Local Roots

No figure in Bengali intellectual history is more globally celebrated than Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). The winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, the first Asian writer to receive that honor, the author of more than two thousand songs, countless poems, plays, novels, short stories, essays, and philosophical texts, and the founder of Visva-Bharati University at Santiniketan, Tagore stands as perhaps the most significant Bengali thinker of the modern era in terms of international recognition. His work has been translated into dozens of languages, his songs are sung at official ceremonies in India and Bangladesh (Gitanjali's opening song "Amar Shonar Bangla" is the national anthem of Bangladesh), and his philosophical ideas about nationalism, education, and human development continue to be cited in debates that span the globe.

But Tagore is also a figure of extraordinary complexity and not a little internal contradiction, and understanding that complexity is essential for understanding the tradition within which Abdul Kafi works. The Tagore who is celebrated globally is often a simplified and in some ways distorted figure: the mystical poet of the soul, the visionary educationist, the gentle humanist who spoke of the meeting of minds across civilizational boundaries. This figure is not false, but it is incomplete. The full Tagore is a far more contested, politically engaged, and intellectually restless figure than this image suggests.

The text that is most directly relevant to Abdul Kafi's principal scholarly work is *Raktakarobi* (Red Oleanders), a play that Tagore wrote in 1924. We will return to this text in detailed textual analysis in a later part of this textbook. But to understand what is at stake in Kafi's analysis of this play, we need to understand something about the broader trajectory of Tagore's intellectual development and about the specific historical and political context within which *Raktakarobi* was composed.

2.2 The Critique of Nationalism: Tagore's Most Controversial Position

Of all Tagore's intellectual positions, none has generated more controversy in the context of Indian political history than his critique of nationalism. In a series of essays published in English as "Nationalism" (1917), and in his Bengali writings and lectures, Tagore argued that nationalism as a political ideology was fundamentally a destructive force, that it divided humanity into competing tribal units defined by enmity toward each other, and that the pursuit of national power was incompatible with the cultivation of those human qualities, empathy, creativity, universalism, that Tagore saw as the highest human values.

This critique of nationalism put Tagore at odds with much of the mainstream of the Indian nationalist movement, which was organized around precisely the demand for national self-determination that Tagore was questioning. It also put him at odds with the Hindu nationalist tradition that Bankimchandra had helped to establish, which saw the recovery of national sovereignty as inseparable from the recovery of Hindu cultural identity. The famous debates

between Tagore and Gandhi about the nature and means of Indian independence, debates in which Tagore questioned Gandhi's championing of the spinning wheel and traditional village life as symbols of national renewal, reflect deep philosophical disagreements about modernity, development, and the proper relationship between individual consciousness and collective political life.

From the perspective of a Marxian literary scholar like Abdul Kafi, Tagore's critique of nationalism is both valuable and insufficient. It is valuable because it recognizes the destructive potential of nationalist ideology and insists on the importance of universal human values that transcend national boundaries. This universalism resonates with the Marxian vision of a humanity that transcends the divisions created by capitalism and imperialism. But it is insufficient because Tagore's universalism, rooted in a spiritualist vision of human unity that draws on both Hindu Vedantism and a broadly humanist tradition of Western thought, fails to engage adequately with the material conditions that produce nationalism, colonialism, and imperialism. The question is not merely whether nationalism is philosophically coherent or humanly admirable. The question is what historical forces produce it, whose interests it serves, and what political alternatives are available given the specific material conditions of a colonized society. These are questions that Tagore's philosophical idealism, for all its genuine nobility, does not fully address.

2.3 Raktakarobi: A Play at the Intersection of Tradition and Modernity

Raktakarobi (1924) is one of Tagore's most complex and most politically charged dramatic works. It was written in the aftermath of a period of intense political engagement and disillusionment, a period in which Tagore had witnessed the First World War destroy the civilizational self-confidence of European liberalism, had seen the rise of mass nationalist movements in Asia including the Swadeshi movement in Bengal and the Non-Cooperation movement led by Gandhi, and had confronted in his own experience the contradiction between his universalist ideals and the specific political demands of a colonized people.

The play is set in the fictional city of Yakshapuri, a city of gold mines where the inhabitants are reduced to nameless, numbered workers, where the natural world is destroyed in the quest for mineral wealth, and where a powerful king rules through a system of bureaucratic control and mystification that keeps the workers enslaved while concealing from them the full extent of their enslavement. The central dramatic conflict involves Nandini, a young woman associated with the red oleanders of the play's title and with a spirit of natural vitality, creative freedom, and erotic power that represents everything the city of gold has suppressed, and the King, who is fascinated by Nandini and by what she represents but who is also the embodiment of the system that destroys what she represents.

The allegorical dimensions of this narrative are clear and have been extensively discussed. Yakshapuri represents the world of industrial capitalism, with its reduction of human beings to productive instruments, its destruction of the natural environment, its mystification of the social relations of exploitation behind a screen of bureaucratic rationality and royal authority. Nandini represents the forces of life, creativity, and human freedom that capitalism suppresses but cannot fully destroy. The red oleander, which gives the play its title, is a flower that blooms even in the

most oppressive conditions, and it serves as a recurring symbol of the persistence of vitality against the forces of death and suppression.

What makes Kafi's analysis of this play so significant for the tradition of Marxian literary scholarship is precisely its insistence on reading the play's philosophical and aesthetic dimensions through the lens of its historical and economic context. The allegorical reading of Yakshapuri as capitalism is obvious enough. What requires more subtle analysis is the question of what specifically the play says about the possibilities of resistance, about the relationship between individual creative freedom and collective political organization, and about the dialectical tension between the demands of immediate political struggle and the longer-term cultural project of imagining and creating a different kind of world.

2.4 Tagore, Marxism, and the Question of Labor

The relationship between Tagore's philosophical vision and the Marxian analysis of labor and capitalism is one of the most fascinating and underexplored areas of Bengali intellectual history. On the surface, Tagore appears to stand at some distance from Marxism. He was not a materialist in the philosophical sense. He believed in the reality of spiritual experience, in the importance of the inner life, in the primacy of creative expression as a human need and human achievement. He was suspicious of the mechanistic aspects of materialist philosophy, finding them reductive of the richness of human experience.

But a closer reading of Tagore's work, including *Raktakarobi*, reveals a much more complex picture. Tagore was deeply sensitive to the destructive effects of capitalist industrialization on human beings and on the natural world. He understood, in a way that many of his contemporaries did not, that the industrial system was not merely an economic arrangement but a civilizational project that transformed the most fundamental dimensions of human life, including the relationship to the body, to the natural environment, to creative work, and to other people. His critique of this system, articulated in aesthetic and philosophical rather than economic terms, converges at many points with the Marxian critique of alienation.

Marx's concept of alienation, developed most fully in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, describes the condition of the worker under capitalism as a condition in which the worker is estranged from the product of their labor, from the process of labor itself, from other human beings, and from their own human essence or species-being. The worker does not create through labor but is created by it, deformed and diminished by the systematic subordination of human creative power to the demands of capital accumulation. This is precisely the condition that Tagore depicts in *Yakshapuri*, where the numbered workers have lost their names, their identities, their connections to the natural world, and their capacity for creative self-expression, all sacrificed to the relentless demand of the gold mines for human labor power.

Reading Tagore's *Raktakarobi* through the lens of Marx's theory of alienation is not an anachronistic imposition of a foreign framework onto a text that does not invite it. It is, rather, a way of making explicit what the text already implies, of connecting Tagore's aesthetic and philosophical critique of industrial capitalism to the economic analysis that gives that critique its material grounding. This is exactly the kind of interpretive move that characterizes the best

Marxian literary criticism, and it is the kind of move that Abdul Kafi's work performs when it situates the three texts of his principal book within the specific historical and economic context of early-twentieth-century India.

CHAPTER THREE: KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM, REVOLUTION, AND THE MAKING OF A RADICAL LITERARY POLITICS

3.1 Nazrul's Significance in Kafi's Intellectual Universe

Of the three texts that give Abdul Kafi's principal book its title, two are directly associated with Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976): *Dhumketu* and *Langol*. This is not coincidental. Nazrul is, in many respects, the figure in Bengali literary history who most directly embodies the convergence of literary creativity, political radicalism, and the specific experience of Muslim Bengali identity that defines the intellectual tradition within which Kafi works. Understanding Nazrul in his full complexity is therefore essential for understanding what Kafi is doing in his scholarly work, what tradition he is working within, and what claims he is making for the political significance of literary culture.

Kazi Nazrul Islam was born in 1899 in Churulia, a village in the Burdwan district of Bengal (now in West Bengal, India), into a poor Muslim family. He had little formal education, and his intellectual formation was shaped primarily by what he read voraciously on his own and by the extraordinary experiences of his early life, including his time in the British Indian Army during the First World War, his immersion in the political and literary culture of Kolkata after the war, and his engagement with the revolutionary and nationalist movements of the 1920s.

Nazrul's literary output was extraordinary in its volume, its variety, and its vitality. He wrote poetry, songs, fiction, essays, and journalism, and in all of these forms he brought a creative energy, a political passion, and a linguistic inventiveness that was entirely his own. His music, which he called Nazrul Geeti, drew on both Hindu devotional traditions, particularly the kirtan and the thumri, and Islamic musical traditions, synthesizing them into a new form that broke down the cultural boundaries between Hindu and Muslim Bengal in a way that was aesthetically radical as well as politically significant.

3.2 *Dhumketu*: The Comet of Revolution

Dhumketu (meaning Comet) was a Bengali political newspaper that Nazrul founded and edited from 1922 to 1923. In its short life of barely more than a year, it became one of the most explosive publications in the history of Bengali journalism. Its significance for understanding the tradition of Bengali radical politics and for understanding Abdul Kafi's scholarly engagement with that tradition is immense.

Dhumketu was not merely a political newspaper in the conventional sense of reporting events and expressing editorial opinions. It was an instrument of revolutionary agitation, a vehicle for Nazrul's vision of a total uprising against colonial rule that would be simultaneously political,

cultural, religious, and human in its scope. The paper proclaimed in its masthead the famous line from Nazrul's poem: "I am the Comet. I am the Great Destroyer." This self-presentation as a destructive force was not nihilistic but dialectical: destruction of the old order was the precondition for the creation of a new one.

The philosophical dimensions of Dhumketu are fascinating and deserve careful analysis. Nazrul's revolutionary politics were informed by an eclectic range of intellectual influences. He had read Marx and the socialist tradition, and his engagement with the question of class exploitation was genuine and sustained. But his radicalism was not primarily economic in its inspiration. It drew more fundamentally on a vision of human liberation that was rooted in the Islamic tradition of social justice, in the Hindu devotional tradition of bhakti with its radical egalitarianism, and in a broadly Romantic celebration of creative energy and human vitality against all forms of oppression and constraint.

This eclecticism has sometimes been criticized by more orthodox Marxist scholars as inconsistency or as evidence that Nazrul never developed a systematic theoretical framework adequate to the problems he was addressing. But this criticism, while not without foundation, misses something important about what makes Nazrul's radicalism distinctive and historically significant. The specific synthesis of Islamic social critique, Hindu bhakti egalitarianism, socialist economics, and Romantic humanism that Nazrul achieved in his most powerful work was not a confused muddle but a creative response to the specific conditions of Bengali society in the 1920s, a society in which the divisions between Hindu and Muslim communities, between peasants and zamindars, between colonial subjects and imperial rulers, were all simultaneously operative and all required simultaneous address. No single theoretical framework available to Nazrul in the 1920s was adequate to address all of these dimensions at once. His response was not to choose one framework and ignore the others but to draw on all of them, using the specific resources of each where they were most relevant and most powerful.

From the perspective of a Marxian literary scholar working in the twenty-first century, this approach raises important questions about the relationship between theoretical rigor and political effectiveness, between the demands of systematic analysis and the realities of the specific historical situations that revolutionary politics must address. These are questions that are directly relevant to the practice of literary scholarship as Abdul Kafi understands it: not as a technical discipline sealed off from political engagement but as a form of intellectual practice that is inseparable from commitment to the transformation of the world.

3.3 Langol: Literature and the Labor Movement

Langol (meaning Plough) was another publication associated with Nazrul, a journal of the Labour Swaraj Party, which Nazrul edited from December 1925. Where Dhumketu had been primarily a vehicle of nationalist agitation, Langol represented a more explicitly class-focused politics, addressing the specific condition of Bengali peasants and workers within the colonial economy and making the case for their organized resistance to exploitation.

The significance of Langol in the tradition of Bengali radical literature lies precisely in this explicit engagement with class politics and with the condition of the laboring majority of Bengali

society. The bhadrakalok tradition of Bengali literary culture, for all its political radicalism, had often maintained a certain distance from the lives and struggles of peasants and workers. Even Tagore, whose sensitivity to the suffering of the poor was genuine and profound, wrote primarily from and for an educated middle-class audience. Langol represented an attempt to create a form of literary and journalistic culture that spoke directly to and for the laboring classes.

The theoretical questions raised by this project are significant for the tradition of Marxian literary scholarship and for Abdul Kafi's work within that tradition. What does it mean to write for and about the working class? Is there a specifically proletarian literary form, as the Soviet tradition of socialist realism claimed, or is literary quality independent of the class position of the subject and the audience? How should literary culture relate to political organization? Is the role of literature primarily to raise consciousness, to inspire action, to provide emotional sustenance, or to offer critical analysis? These questions were debated intensely in the 1920s and 1930s in the context of both the Soviet experiment in socialist culture and the growth of the progressive writers and artists movements in India, and they remain central to any serious Marxian approach to literary scholarship.

3.4 Nazrul's Religious Universalism and Its Political Implications

One of the most distinctive and most debated aspects of Nazrul's literary and cultural project is what has been called his religious universalism, the insistence on the equality of all religious traditions and the fundamental unity of the human spirit beneath their surface differences. This universalism was expressed not only in his theoretical writings and his journalism but in his poetry and his music, which drew with equal facility on Hindu and Muslim religious traditions, using the forms and imagery of both to express a vision of human devotion that transcended sectarian boundaries.

In the context of a Bengal increasingly divided by communal tensions in the 1920s and approaching the catastrophic partition of 1947, Nazrul's religious universalism was a politically charged position. It was a refusal of the sectarian politics that were dividing Bengali society along Hindu-Muslim lines, a refusal of both Hindu nationalism of the Bankimchandra variety and of Muslim communalism of the kind that would eventually produce the demand for Pakistan. Nazrul's vision was of a Bengal in which Hindu and Muslim could be equally Bengali, in which the cultural resources of both traditions could be shared and synthesized, and in which communal identity would be subordinate to the larger human solidarities of class, nation, and humanity.

This vision was never fully realized in his lifetime and is in many respects even further from realization today than it was in the 1920s. The partition of 1947 created a deep structural division in Bengali society that Nazrul's universalism was unable to prevent or overcome. The subsequent history of communal violence, of the Bangladesh liberation war of 1971, of the growing tensions between Hindu and Muslim communities in West Bengal under successive governments, all testify to the persistence and depth of the divisions that Nazrul had hoped to dissolve.

But the failure of Nazrul's universalism as a political program does not diminish its significance as a philosophical and literary position. It remains one of the most powerful articulations in Bengali intellectual history of the possibility of a pluralist, synthesizing cultural vision that draws

on the resources of multiple traditions rather than insisting on the exclusive priority of any one of them. For Abdul Kafi, working as a Muslim Bengali intellectual in the tradition that Nazrul helped to create, this vision is not merely historically interesting but personally and politically significant. It offers a model of intellectual engagement with the problem of communal identity that refuses both assimilation into a dominant Hindu nationalism and retreat into a defensive Muslim separatism, seeking instead a form of Bengali intellectual identity that is genuinely pluralist and genuinely universal in its commitments.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE PROGRESSIVE WRITERS MOVEMENT AND THE MARXIAN AESTHETICS OF COMMITMENT

4.1 The Formation of a Radical Literary Culture

The Progressive Writers Association (PWA), founded in 1936 with its first conference in Lucknow, and the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), founded in 1943, represent the institutionalization of a Marxian cultural politics in India that had been developing since the 1920s. Together, these organizations created a network of writers, artists, musicians, and theater practitioners committed to the use of cultural production as an instrument of political education and social transformation. The influence of these organizations on Bengali literary culture was profound and long-lasting, and it is impossible to understand the tradition within which Abdul Kafi works without understanding what the progressive movement contributed to that tradition.

The founding manifesto of the PWA, drafted largely by Sajjad Zaheer and signed by a range of significant Indian writers including Premchand, called for a literature that would address the real conditions of Indian social life, that would not retreat into aesthetic formalism or nostalgic romanticism but would confront the realities of poverty, exploitation, communal violence, and colonial oppression. This demand for social engagement was not, in the most thoughtful articulations of the progressive project, a demand for mere propaganda. The best progressive critics, including Mulk Raj Anand, who had studied with Wittgenstein at Cambridge and brought a sophisticated philosophical education to bear on questions of literary form and political commitment, were aware of the tensions between artistic quality and political urgency and sought to find ways of holding them together.

In Bengal specifically, the progressive movement drew on an already existing tradition of socially engaged literature and cultural politics. Bengali writers had been engaging with questions of poverty, exploitation, and social injustice since at least the 1870s. The specific contribution of the progressive movement was to provide a more systematic theoretical framework for this engagement, connecting it to the Marxian analysis of capitalism and imperialism and to the international debates about socialist literature and the role of the writer in a revolutionary period.

4.2 The IPTA and the Transformation of Bengali Theater

The Indian People's Theatre Association had a particularly significant impact on Bengali theater, and through theater on the broader cultural life of Bengal. The IPTA brought together theater practitioners, musicians, dancers, and visual artists in a collaborative project that saw cultural production as inseparable from political practice. The most celebrated productions of the Bengali IPTA, including Bijon Bhattacharya's *Nabanna* (1944), a play about the Bengal Famine of 1943, demonstrated that theater could be both artistically powerful and politically urgent, that the aesthetic and the political dimensions of cultural work were not necessarily in tension but could reinforce each other.

The Bengal Famine of 1943, which killed between two and three million people and has been analyzed by economists including Amartya Sen as a man-made disaster resulting from British colonial policy rather than mere natural scarcity, was a defining event for the progressive movement in Bengal. The IPTA's cultural response to the famine, including *Nabanna* and the famous cultural marches through the devastated countryside, represented a form of political commitment that went beyond words and manifestos to concrete solidarity with the suffering of ordinary people. This tradition of committed cultural practice, of seeing cultural work as inseparable from the demand for social justice, is one of the most important elements of the intellectual heritage that Abdul Kafi's scholarship draws on and extends.

4.3 Debates Within the Progressive Tradition: Realism, Form, and Politics

The progressive literary tradition was not monolithic, and the debates within it about the appropriate relationship between form and content, between artistic quality and political commitment, between socialist realism as an aesthetic program and the diverse traditions of modernist and experimental writing, are among the most intellectually interesting in the history of twentieth-century literary criticism.

The Soviet doctrine of socialist realism, officially promulgated in 1934 and requiring writers to depict reality in its revolutionary development, to show the progressive forces of history triumphing over the reactionary ones, and to do so in a form accessible to the working class, was enormously influential in the international communist movement including the Indian progressive writers and artists movements. But it also generated resistance, most notably from writers who felt that the demand for accessible, optimistic, politically correct realism was incompatible with an honest and aesthetically sophisticated engagement with the complexities of human experience.

The Indian progressive tradition included figures who engaged seriously with these debates. Faiz Ahmad Faiz, the great Urdu progressive poet, demonstrated that committed poetry could achieve levels of formal sophistication and aesthetic complexity that were entirely consistent with its political urgency. Sa'adat Hasan Manto, in his extraordinary short fiction about partition violence, showed that political writing could be disturbing, morally complex, and aesthetically radical in ways that socialist realism explicitly prohibited. In Bengal, the novelist Manik Bandyopadhyay, who was closely associated with the progressive movement, developed forms of psychological realism that addressed the inner life of his characters with a sophistication that went beyond the prescriptions of orthodox socialist realism.

These debates within the progressive tradition are directly relevant to the practice of literary scholarship that Abdul Kafi represents. A Marxian literary criticism that is adequate to the best work produced by the progressive movement cannot simply apply a set of predetermined criteria derived from Soviet aesthetic doctrine. It must engage with the specific artistic achievements of the texts it analyzes, attending to the specific ways in which form and content interact in particular works to produce political meanings that exceed what any programmatic statement of intent could capture. This is the kind of critical practice that Kafi's work exemplifies: not the application of a predetermined ideological template but a genuine engagement with the specific aesthetic and political dimensions of the texts under analysis.

4.4 The Legacy of the Progressive Movement in Contemporary Bengali Literary Culture

The progressive movement did not simply end with the dissolution of the organizations that had given it institutional form. Its legacy continues in the intellectual culture of Bengali literary scholarship, including the tradition that Kafi represents. This legacy is complex and contested. On the positive side, the progressive movement bequeathed to subsequent generations a tradition of engaged literary scholarship that refuses to separate aesthetic questions from political ones, that insists on the social significance of literary production and reception, and that sees the intellectual as necessarily committed to the broader struggle for social justice.

On the more problematic side, the progressive movement also bequeathed a set of theoretical commitments and institutional identifications that have sometimes prevented adequate engagement with the full range of literary experience. The prioritization of certain themes and forms over others, the suspicion of modernist experiment and of literary difficulty, the tendency to evaluate literature primarily in terms of its usefulness for political mobilization: these tendencies have at various points limited the critical range of progressive literary scholarship and prevented it from engaging adequately with writers and texts that do not fit neatly into its preferred categories.

Abdul Kafi's work can be understood, in part, as an attempt to navigate between these two aspects of the progressive legacy: to preserve and extend what is most valuable in the tradition of engaged literary scholarship while being willing to critique and revise what is limiting or distorting. This navigation requires both a deep familiarity with the tradition and a willingness to think beyond its received categories, drawing on the wider resources of contemporary literary theory, cultural studies, postcolonial criticism, and philosophical analysis to develop a critical practice adequate to the complexity of the texts and questions that the tradition raises.

CHAPTER FIVE: PARTITION, MEMORY, AND THE WOUNDS OF HISTORY IN BENGALI LITERATURE

5.1 The Partition of 1947 and Its Literary Aftermath

No event in the history of Bengal has been more catastrophic or more consequential for the subsequent development of Bengali literary culture than the partition of 1947. The division of

Bengal along religious lines, creating East Bengal as part of Pakistan (later Bangladesh) and West Bengal as part of India, was accompanied by violence, displacement, and human suffering on an enormous scale. Millions of people were forced to leave their homes, their communities, their lands, and their cultural worlds. Entire ways of life were destroyed. Families were divided, communities were torn apart, and the specific cultural ecology of a society that had maintained, despite enormous tensions and periodic violence, a form of multi-communal coexistence for centuries was shattered beyond repair.

The literary response to this catastrophe has been one of the most significant and most complex bodies of writing in the Bengali literary tradition. Partition literature in Bengali is now recognized as a distinct genre with its own forms, its own preoccupations, and its own theoretical debates about the relationship between literature and history, between individual experience and collective trauma, and between the demands of aesthetic representation and the ethical imperatives of bearing witness to suffering.

Understanding partition literature is essential for understanding the full context of Abdul Kafi's intellectual work for several reasons. First, partition is the historical event that most directly shaped the social and cultural world in which contemporary Bengali literary scholarship takes place. The West Bengal within which Jadavpur University is located, the Bengali cultural community that the Centre for Marxian Studies addresses, the publishing culture of Kolkata that produced Kafi's book through the National Book Agency: all of these are formations of a post-partition Bengal that cannot be fully understood without confronting the violence and loss that partition entailed. Second, partition is particularly relevant to the specific situation of Muslim Bengali intellectuals like Kafi, who live and work in a society in which they belong to a minority community whose cultural and political situation is directly shaped by the consequences of partition and the communal politics that produced it. Third, the literary and philosophical questions raised by partition literature, questions about trauma and memory, about the representation of violence, about the relationship between individual testimony and historical analysis, are questions that are directly relevant to the practice of literary scholarship that Kafi's work represents.

5.2 The Literature of Witness: Writing About What Cannot Be Said

One of the most powerful and most theoretically interesting aspects of partition literature in Bengali is the attempt to find literary forms adequate to the representation of experiences that exceed the capacity of conventional narrative. The violence of partition, the destruction of communities, the displacement of millions of people, the experience of being reduced overnight from a member of a rooted community to a refugee without home or belonging: these experiences challenge the resources of literary representation in fundamental ways.

The problem is not simply one of finding appropriate words for extreme experiences, though that challenge is real. It is more fundamentally a problem about the relationship between literary form and historical reality. Can literature represent historical catastrophe without aestheticizing it, without turning suffering into spectacle, without imposing on the chaos and violence of historical events the false consolations of narrative resolution? These questions have been debated extensively in the context of Holocaust literature and of other literatures of historical catastrophe,

and the debates have generated important theoretical insights that are directly relevant to the analysis of Bengali partition literature.

The German philosopher Theodor Adorno's famous and much-misunderstood statement that to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric raises precisely this problem. Adorno was not arguing that literature should be silent in the face of historical catastrophe. He was arguing that conventional literary forms, with their implicit promise of aesthetic resolution and closure, are inadequate to the representation of experiences that resist resolution and closure. The appropriate literary response to catastrophe, in Adorno's view, is not silence but a different kind of writing, a writing that incorporates the resistance to representation into its own form, that acknowledges the inadequacy of all available languages while still attempting to speak.

Bengali partition literature has found various ways of responding to this challenge. Some writers, like Ritwik Ghatak in his films (particularly *Meghe Dhaka Tara* and *Subarnarekha*), have developed forms of aesthetic excess, of melodrama deliberately pushed beyond its own conventions, that use the formal resources of popular culture while simultaneously critiquing and transforming them. Others, like Sunil Gangopadhyay in his epic novel of partition, have opted for the resources of realistic narrative, attempting to document the complexity of the historical experience through the accumulation of individual stories. Still others have developed forms of ellipsis and indirection, approaching the unspeakable through what surrounds it rather than by direct confrontation.

5.3 Communal Memory, Historical Truth, and the Politics of Representation

The representation of partition in Bengali literature raises not only aesthetic and philosophical questions but deeply political ones. Whose memory of partition is represented? From whose perspective is the story told? Whose suffering is acknowledged and whose is minimized or ignored? These questions are politically fraught because the violence of partition was not evenly distributed across communal lines. In some areas, Hindus were primarily the victims of violence. In others, Muslims were. In still others, violence was mutual and indiscriminate. The political uses to which memories of partition violence are put in contemporary India and Bangladesh are directly connected to the specific ways in which partition is remembered and represented.

For Abdul Kafi, working as a Muslim Bengali intellectual in West Bengal, these questions are not merely theoretical. He lives and works in a society in which the memory of partition is a live political issue, in which communal tensions continue to shape daily life, and in which the specific position of the Muslim minority in West Bengal is deeply connected to the history of partition and to the ongoing dynamics of Hindu-Muslim relations in India. His intellectual work must therefore navigate between the demands of honest historical scholarship, which requires acknowledging the full complexity and ambiguity of partition violence, and the political realities of a situation in which representations of that violence can be instrumentalized in the service of communal mobilization.

The Marxian tradition within which Kafi works offers certain resources for navigating this complexity. The Marxian analysis of communalism, which sees it as a form of false consciousness that divides the laboring classes along religious lines and thereby serves the

interests of the ruling classes, provides a framework for understanding partition violence that is at once historically grounded and politically critical. But this analysis has also been challenged by scholars who argue that it underestimates the independent historical power of religious identity and communal solidarity, that it reduces to ideology what is also a genuine form of cultural belonging, and that its insistence on class as the primary determinant of political behavior is contradicted by the historical evidence of partition itself, in which class solidarity across communal lines proved far weaker than religious solidarity within them.

These debates about the Marxian analysis of communalism are directly relevant to the kind of literary scholarship that Kafi represents. A Marxian literary criticism that takes partition literature seriously cannot simply apply the class analysis as if the complexities of communal identity were reducible to it. It must engage with those complexities directly, drawing on the Marxian tradition's most sophisticated resources while being willing to revise and extend them in light of what the literary and historical evidence actually shows.

5.4 The Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 and its Literary Consequences

The liberation war of 1971, in which Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) won its independence from Pakistan after a brutal military campaign in which the Pakistani army killed hundreds of thousands of civilians and committed systematic atrocities against the Bengali population, is another defining event in the history of Bengali literary culture. The war produced its own literature of witness: poetry, fiction, memoir, and journalism that documented the violence, celebrated the resistance, mourned the dead, and attempted to make sense of a catastrophe that was at once a national liberation and a human catastrophe of enormous proportions.

The literary and cultural significance of 1971 for the Bengali literary tradition as a whole, not only for Bangladeshi literature but for West Bengali literature as well, is enormous. The liberation war demonstrated the persistence and the power of Bengali linguistic and cultural identity across the political boundary that partition had established between India and Pakistan. Bengali speakers on both sides of that boundary responded to the events of 1971 with an intensity that reflected their sense of shared cultural belonging. West Bengali intellectuals, artists, and writers were deeply engaged with the struggle for Bangladeshi independence, and their responses to it, through journalism, through cultural solidarity events, through creative work inspired by the events of the war, became part of the literary record of 1971.

For a tradition of Bengali literary scholarship like the one that Abdul Kafi represents, the literature of 1971 raises important questions about the relationship between literary culture and political history, about the specific ways in which literary forms can both document and transform historical experience, and about the connections between the literary cultures of West Bengal and Bangladesh that partition had formally divided. The curriculum of the Department of Bengali at Jadavpur University, which includes the literature of Bangladesh as a specific area of focus, reflects a determination to maintain these connections against the political and institutional forces that would allow partition to determine the boundaries of literary culture.

CHAPTER SIX: MANIK BANDYOPADHYAY AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF EXPLOITATION

6.1 Manik's Place in the Bengali Literary Tradition

Manik Bandyopadhyay (1908-1956) is one of the great novelists of Bengali literature and one of the central figures in the tradition of Marxian literary culture that Abdul Kafi works within and extends. His short life, marked by poverty, illness, political commitment, and extraordinary creative productivity, produced a body of fiction that remains among the most powerful and most disturbing in the Bengali literary tradition. To understand Kafi's scholarly project fully, we need to understand what Manik achieved and what questions his work raises.

Manik's most celebrated novels, including *Padma Nadir Majhi* (Boatman of the River Padma, 1936) and *Putul Nacher Itikatha* (The Doll's Drama, 1936), demonstrate a capacity for psychological realism that distinguishes his work from both the romantic nationalism of the Tagore era and the more straightforwardly political writing of the progressive movement. Where the socialist realist tradition tended to produce idealized worker-heroes who embody the progressive forces of history, Manik's fiction gives us characters who are shaped by their social and economic conditions in ways that are painful, contradictory, and sometimes deeply unflattering. His fishermen and peasants, his lower-middle-class professionals and their families, his figures of social marginality and psychological complexity, are not heroes of a triumphant narrative of class liberation. They are human beings in the full complexity of their social determination, their desires, their failures, and their moments of unexpected dignity.

6.2 The Psychology of Poverty and Exploitation

Manik's specific contribution to the tradition of Marxian literary culture in Bengal was his insistence on exploring the psychological dimensions of economic exploitation, the ways in which poverty and social powerlessness shape not only the material conditions of life but the inner life of consciousness, desire, and self-understanding. This insistence on psychological depth was informed by Manik's serious engagement with Freudian psychoanalysis, which he brought to bear on the analysis of Bengali social life in ways that both extended and complicated the orthodox Marxian analysis of class exploitation.

The relationship between Marxism and psychoanalysis has been one of the most productive and most contested areas of twentieth-century critical theory. The Frankfurt School theorists, particularly Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm, attempted to develop syntheses of the two traditions that would illuminate the psychological mechanisms through which social domination operates and reproduces itself. Wilhelm Reich developed a theory of character armor that connected the analysis of individual psychological defense mechanisms to the analysis of fascism as a social and political phenomenon. Louis Althusser's analysis of ideological state apparatuses drew on both Marxian and Freudian concepts to analyze the mechanisms through which individuals are constituted as subjects within capitalist social relations.

Manik Bandyopadhyay did not work within any of these specifically theoretical frameworks. But his literary engagement with the psychology of poverty and exploitation produced a body of

fiction that illuminates dimensions of social life that theoretical frameworks sometimes miss. His characters are shaped by their class positions, certainly, but they are also shaped by desires, fears, and psychological needs that cannot be fully explained by reference to their material circumstances alone. The relationship between the economic and the psychological in Manik's fiction is not one of simple determination but of complex interaction, in which material conditions constrain and shape the possibilities of inner life while inner life simultaneously inflects the ways in which individuals experience and respond to their material conditions.

For the tradition of Marxian literary scholarship that Kafi represents, Manik's fiction raises important theoretical questions about the relationship between base and superstructure, between economic determination and psychological complexity, and about the appropriate forms of literary representation for capturing this relationship. A Marxian literary criticism that is adequate to Manik's achievement must be able to engage with the psychological dimensions of his fiction without reducing them to mere reflections of economic structure, while also maintaining the analytical connection between individual psychology and social totality that distinguishes Marxian analysis from purely individualistic psychological approaches.

6.3 Jibanananda Das and the Inner Life of Bengali Modernity

Any comprehensive account of Bengali literary modernity must include a consideration of Jibanananda Das (1899-1954), one of the most significant Bengali poets of the twentieth century. Das represents a tradition of lyric interiority, of meditative engagement with the natural world and the human psyche, that appears at first glance to be entirely separate from the politically engaged tradition that runs from Nazrul through the progressive movement to Kafi's scholarly work. But the relationship between these two traditions, the politically engaged and the lyrically introverted, is more complex than this first appearance suggests, and understanding that relationship is essential for understanding the full range of the Bengali literary tradition.

Jibanananda Das is most famous for his poem "Banalata Sen," one of the most celebrated poems in the Bengali language, and for his use of the imagery of the Bengali countryside, particularly the landscape of Barisal (now in Bangladesh) where he grew up, to explore themes of memory, loss, the passage of time, and the yearning for a peace and rootedness that modernity has made impossible. His poetry is suffused with a quality of melancholy and longing that has resonated deeply with Bengali readers across generations and that has been interpreted in various ways: as a response to the experience of displacement and partition, as an expression of the alienation of the modern subject, and as a form of resistance to the demands of modernity through the cultivation of an inner life that preserves the memory of what has been lost.

The political dimensions of this apparently apolitical poetry are real, even if they are not immediately obvious. The insistence on the value of the inner life, on the irreducibility of individual consciousness to social function, on the importance of the natural world as a site of meaning that exceeds what the demands of productivity and efficiency can accommodate: these are political positions, even if they are not articulated in the language of direct political critique. They represent a refusal of the logic of capitalist modernity's reduction of all value to exchange value, a refusal articulated in aesthetic rather than economic terms but no less significant for that.

The relationship between Jibanananda's lyricism and the Marxian tradition of politically engaged literary culture is one of the most interesting theoretical problems in Bengali literary studies. A Marxian literary criticism adequate to the full range of Bengali literary production must be able to engage with the lyric tradition, to analyze its political dimensions without reducing them to mere ideology or escaping into a pure aestheticism that ignores them. This is one of the theoretical challenges that the best Marxian literary scholarship faces, and it is a challenge that Kafi's work engages with in its insistence on reading even apparently apolitical texts through the lens of their historical and political context.

CHAPTER SEVEN: ECONOMIC ANALYSIS AND LITERARY CULTURE: BASE, SUPERSTRUCTURE, AND BEYOND

7.1 The Problem of Economic Determination in Literary Analysis

One of the most enduring and most debated questions in Marxian literary theory is the question of the relationship between economic structure and literary production. The famous formulation in Marx's Preface to "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy" (1859), which describes the economic structure of society as the real foundation on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness, has been interpreted in radically different ways by different Marxian theorists.

The most mechanistic interpretation, sometimes called economic determinism or vulgar Marxism, holds that literary production is simply a reflection of the economic base, that literary forms and contents are determined by the class interests of the dominant economic class in any given historical period, and that literary analysis consists primarily in identifying these class interests and showing how they are expressed or concealed in specific literary works. This interpretation has the virtue of simplicity but the vice of reducing the rich complexity of literary production to a mechanical function of economic structure.

More sophisticated interpretations of the base-superstructure relationship have been developed by a range of Marxian theorists, including Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Raymond Williams, and Fredric Jameson, each of whom has attempted to preserve the insight that literature is shaped by social and economic conditions while doing justice to the relative autonomy of literary production and the complexity of its relationship to the economic base.

For the tradition of Bengali Marxian literary scholarship, these theoretical debates are not merely academic exercises. They have direct implications for the practice of literary criticism and for the evaluation of specific literary works. How should we understand the relationship between the specific material conditions of early-twentieth-century Bengal, the colonial economy, the zamindari system, the Bengal Famine, the progressive industrialization under colonial rule, and the specific literary forms and contents produced in that context? This question is at the heart of the kind of scholarship that Kafi's work represents.

7.2 Raymond Williams and the Concept of the Long Revolution

Raymond Williams, the Welsh cultural theorist and Marxian critic, developed in a series of influential works including "Culture and Society" (1958), "The Long Revolution" (1961), and "Marxism and Literature" (1977) a sophisticated account of the relationship between literary culture and social structure that has been enormously influential in anglophone Marxian literary scholarship. Williams's concept of the "long revolution," which describes the interrelated transformations of democracy, industry, and culture in modern history as aspects of a single deep historical process, provides a framework for understanding literary change that is both genuinely historical and genuinely attentive to the specificity of cultural production.

Williams's most important theoretical contribution for the practice of literary criticism is his concept of "structures of feeling," defined as the lived experience of a particular historical period, the way in which the dominant, residual, and emergent elements of a social formation are experienced and expressed in the texture of cultural production. This concept allows Williams to analyze literature and culture without reducing them to mere reflections of economic structure, while still maintaining the connection between cultural production and the broader social formation within which it takes place.

The relevance of Williams's framework to the Bengali literary tradition and to the kind of scholarship that Kafi represents is substantial. The Bengali literary tradition of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is precisely a site where dominant, residual, and emergent cultural forms are in complex and productive tension. Bankimchandra's fiction represents both the dominant culture of *bhadralok* nationalism and the residual culture of Hindu tradition, while simultaneously being inflected by the emergent culture of colonial modernity. Tagore's work incorporates residual elements of the Vaishnava devotional tradition while expressing the dominant humanism of the Indian National Congress era and anticipating the emergent critique of nationalism that would become more urgent as the century progressed. Nazrul's journalism and poetry represent primarily an emergent culture, one that had not yet achieved institutional dominance but that was creating new possibilities for Bengali literary and political expression.

Reading the Bengali literary tradition through Williams's framework of dominant, residual, and emergent cultural formations allows for a historically nuanced analysis that does justice to the complexity of individual texts while situating them within the broader structure of their social and historical moment. This is precisely the kind of analysis that Kafi's work performs, even where it does not explicitly invoke Williams's terminology.

7.3 The Political Economy of Indian Publishing and Bengali Literary Culture

Any serious engagement with the economic dimensions of Bengali literary culture must attend not only to the theoretical question of the relationship between literature and the economy but to the concrete material conditions of literary production: the publishing industry, the reading public, the educational system that shapes literary tastes and distributes cultural capital, the market structures that determine which texts are published and which are not.

The National Book Agency, which published Abdul Kafi's book, occupies a distinctive position in this political economy of Indian publishing. Founded in 1939 as a specifically left-wing publishing house committed to making progressive and Marxian literature accessible to Bengali

readers, the NBA has historically operated on a different logic from commercial publishers. Its mission has been explicitly pedagogical and political, to produce books that serve the needs of the left-wing intellectual community and that make the resources of Marxian scholarship available to a broad Bengali readership, rather than to maximize profit. This means that the books the NBA publishes, and the authors it publishes, are selected according to criteria that are at least partly ideological as well as commercial.

Understanding this publishing context is essential for understanding the reception and significance of Kafi's work. When his book is published by the NBA, it is not merely being given a commercial platform. It is being incorporated into a specific tradition of left-wing intellectual production that has its own audiences, its own evaluation criteria, its own distribution networks, and its own relationship to the broader political culture of the Bengali left. This is a tradition that gives his work a specific institutional location and a specific community of readers, and these factors are not irrelevant to the kind of work he does and to the way in which it is received.

The broader political economy of Indian publishing in the twenty-first century is shaped by forces that pose significant challenges to the kind of engaged, politically committed intellectual production that the NBA tradition represents. The globalization of the publishing industry, the growth of corporate publishing houses that prioritize commercial viability over intellectual or political significance, the shift toward English-language publishing as the primary vehicle of academic and intellectual prestige, and the fiscal pressures on state and public institutions that have historically supported left-wing cultural production: all of these forces create an environment in which Bengali-language Marxian scholarship faces significant structural challenges.

The implications of this situation for the tradition of Bengali intellectual culture that Kafi represents are profound. If the economic conditions of literary production continue to shift in the direction of global commercial publishing, then the specifically Bengali and specifically left-wing tradition of literary scholarship that the NBA has historically supported may find itself increasingly marginalized. The political economy of literary culture is therefore not merely an academic subject of study. It is a set of material conditions that directly shape the possibilities of the kind of intellectual work that Kafi and scholars like him do.

CHAPTER EIGHT: LEGAL, CONSTITUTIONAL, AND JURISPRUDENTIAL DIMENSIONS OF BENGALI INTELLECTUAL CULTURE

8.1 Law and Literature as Parallel Forms of Social Knowledge

The relationship between law and literature is one of the most fertile and most underexplored areas in the academic study of both disciplines. Law and literature are both forms of social knowledge that use language to construct, regulate, and contest the social order. Both are practices of interpretation that involve complex questions about meaning, intention, authority, and the relationship between the text and the world it addresses. Both have their own histories, their own institutional contexts, their own forms of expertise, and their own relationships to

power. And both, in the specific context of colonial and postcolonial India, have been sites of intense political contest about the nature of authority, the meaning of rights, and the proper relationship between the state and the community.

The emergence of the interdisciplinary field of Law and Literature in American and European academia since the 1970s has generated a rich body of scholarship that explores these connections, drawing on literary theory to illuminate legal interpretation and on legal analysis to illuminate the social and political dimensions of literary texts. The most influential contributions to this field, from Ronald Dworkin's literary theory of legal interpretation in "Law's Empire" (1986) to James Boyd White's account of the literary dimensions of legal reasoning in "The Legal Imagination" (1973), to Martha Nussbaum's argument in "Poetic Justice" (1995) that literary imagination is a necessary component of just legal reasoning, have opened up new ways of thinking about both law and literature that are directly relevant to the kind of scholarship that Kafi's work represents.

For a Bengali Marxian scholar, the law-literature relationship has specific dimensions that reflect the particular history of the colonial and postcolonial legal system in India. The British colonial legal system, which imposed on India a set of legal institutions and procedures derived from English common law and Roman law, was not a neutral framework for the resolution of social conflict. It was a form of political domination that privileged certain kinds of knowledge and certain kinds of social actors while marginalizing others, that imposed particular conceptions of property, contract, family, and liability that were shaped by the specific interests of the colonial economy, and that used the language of universal legal principle to conceal what were in fact the particular interests of the colonial power.

8.2 Constitutional Law and the Protection of Language Rights

The Indian Constitution of 1950 is a remarkable document, a product of the extraordinary deliberations of the Constituent Assembly under the leadership of B.R. Ambedkar, that attempted to provide a framework for a democratic, secular, and socially just republic. Its specific provisions relating to language, culture, and the rights of linguistic minorities are particularly relevant to the tradition of Bengali intellectual culture that Abdul Kafi works within.

Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and expression, which includes the freedom to speak and write in the language of one's choice. Articles 29 and 30, as noted in Part Four of this textbook, guarantee the rights of linguistic and cultural minorities to conserve their distinct language and culture and to establish educational institutions in that language. These constitutional provisions provide a legal framework within which the defense of Bengali-language culture against the pressures of Hindi imposition and English-language globalization can be articulated.

But constitutional provisions, however well-intentioned, do not guarantee their own implementation. The gap between the formal rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the material realities of linguistic inequality in India is one of the central issues in the political economy of language in the subcontinent. The dominance of Hindi in national political life, the advantage conferred by English-language education in the labor market, and the structural

disadvantage faced by speakers of regional languages in national institutions of higher education and professional training: these material realities create forms of linguistic injustice that constitutional provisions alone cannot address.

The jurisprudential dimensions of this situation are significant. What theory of rights is adequate to the demands of linguistic justice in a multilingual society as complex and diverse as India? Should linguistic rights be understood as individual rights, belonging to each speaker as an individual, or as collective rights, belonging to linguistic communities as such? How should conflicts between linguistic rights and other fundamental rights, such as the right to free movement and equal treatment regardless of regional origin, be adjudicated? These questions require both philosophical analysis and legal reasoning of the kind that the Law and Literature tradition has developed, and they are directly relevant to the political situation of Bengali-language intellectual culture in contemporary India.

8.3 The Law and the University: Institutional Autonomy, Academic Freedom, and State Power

The specific institutional context within which Abdul Kafi works, Jadavpur University, has been at various points in its history a site of conflict between the claims of academic freedom and the demands of state power. The university's tradition of political engagement and its culture of institutional autonomy have at various points brought it into conflict with government authorities who have sought to limit or direct its activities.

The legal and constitutional framework of university governance in India reflects complex and sometimes contradictory principles. On the one hand, the constitutional principle of academic freedom, which while not explicitly stated in the Constitution has been recognized by the Supreme Court as an implicit dimension of the fundamental right to free speech, education, and the pursuit of knowledge, implies a significant degree of autonomy for universities from direct state control. On the other hand, the legislative frameworks governing university governance in India, including the University Grants Commission Act and the state-level university acts, vest significant authority over university governance in state governments and in statutory bodies that are appointed by governments.

The tension between these principles, between academic autonomy and state oversight, has been particularly acute in the context of the BJP government's cultural and educational policies since 2014. The Modi government's attempts to reshape Indian universities through the appointment of politically sympathetic vice-chancellors and governing board members, the revision of curricula in ways that reflect Hindu nationalist cultural politics, and the use of state power to intimidate and punish academics who are critical of government policy, have created a climate of pressure on academic freedom that has been widely documented and discussed.

Jadavpur University's response to these pressures has been shaped by its distinctive institutional culture and by the active engagement of its faculty and students in defense of academic freedom. The university's tradition of political engagement, which has sometimes made it a target of government criticism, has also given it the organizational resources and the institutional commitment to resist the most egregious forms of political interference with academic life.

Abdul Kafi's position as a coordinator of the Centre for Marxian Studies, in this context, represents not only a scholarly but a political commitment to maintaining the conditions of free intellectual inquiry against the pressures of political conformity.

8.4 Criminal Law, the 2019 Attack, and the Question of Academic Safety

The 2019 attack on Abdul Kafi by a former postgraduate student represents a specific instance of a broader problem: the physical safety of academics in contexts of political and social conflict. This incident, as noted in Part One of this textbook, involved a former student who had harbored grievances against Kafi and had been engaged in a pattern of stalking and threatening behavior before the attack occurred. The legal response to this incident, and the broader questions it raises about the safety of academics in their professional environment, deserve sustained analysis.

From a legal perspective, the case involves provisions of the Indian Penal Code relating to assault, stalking, and threats, as well as questions about the university's institutional responsibilities for the safety of its staff. The broader context of the case, in which academic disputes about evaluations, publications, and institutional decisions can generate the kind of intense resentment that escalates to violence, raises important questions about the psychological and social dynamics of academic life and about the institutional mechanisms that should exist to manage conflict before it reaches the point of physical danger.

The philosophical and political dimensions of this incident are also significant. The vulnerability of academics who take controversial intellectual or political positions to harassment, threats, and physical violence is a genuine and serious problem that affects intellectual freedom in ways that formal legal protections alone cannot address. The willingness of scholars to engage in genuinely controversial intellectual work, to question received orthodoxies, to support marginalized positions and challenge powerful interests, is directly affected by their assessment of the personal risks that such engagement entails. A culture of intellectual freedom requires not only formal legal protections for free expression but also social norms and institutional practices that make such expression genuinely safe in practice. The 2019 incident raises the question of whether those norms and practices are adequately established in the current environment of Bengali academic life.

CHAPTER NINE: POLITICAL THEORY, DEMOCRACY, AND THE COMMITTED INTELLECTUAL

9.1 The Indian Left in the Twenty-First Century: Crisis and Renewal

Any account of Abdul Kafi's intellectual work and political commitments must engage with the current state of the Indian left, which has undergone a profound crisis since the electoral defeat of the Left Front government in West Bengal in 2011 after thirty-four years of continuous rule. Understanding this crisis, its causes, its consequences, and the debates within the left about how to respond to it, is essential for understanding the political context of Kafi's scholarly and institutional work.

The Left Front's defeat in 2011 ended one of the longest-running communist-led governments in a parliamentary democracy anywhere in the world. The Left Front, led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), had governed West Bengal since 1977 and had achieved significant gains in rural areas through land reform under Operation Barga, the sharecropping program that redistributed the gains from agricultural production toward the peasantry. But by 2011, the Left Front had been weakened by a combination of factors: the long years in power had produced a degree of political complacency and organizational decay, the forcible acquisition of farmland for industrial development at Singur and Nandigram had alienated significant sections of the rural support base, and the rise of the Trinamool Congress under Mamata Banerjee had offered a populist alternative that proved more attractive to many voters, particularly women and the poor, than the increasingly bureaucratic and sometimes authoritarian left political machine.

The electoral defeat of the left, compounded by the rise of the BJP and its Hindu nationalist politics to national dominance after 2014, has created a political situation in which the intellectual tradition that Kafi represents faces serious challenges. The left in West Bengal has been reduced to a marginal political force, unable to challenge either the Trinamool Congress government or the growing influence of the BJP. The institutional support that left political culture had enjoyed under the Left Front government, through patronage of cultural organizations, publishing houses, and educational institutions, has been severely curtailed. And the broader political climate of nationalist mobilization and communal polarization that the BJP has fostered nationally creates a social environment that is actively hostile to the kind of universalist, class-based, secular-progressive intellectual politics that the Marxian tradition represents.

9.2 Gramsci, the Organic Intellectual, and the Role of the Scholar in Political Struggle

The Italian Marxian theorist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), writing from prison during the fascist period in Italy, developed a theory of the intellectual that remains one of the most illuminating frameworks for understanding the role that scholars like Abdul Kafi play in the broader project of social and political transformation. Gramsci's distinction between "traditional" intellectuals, who present themselves as autonomous from class interests and claim to represent universal values, and "organic" intellectuals, who emerge from within specific social classes and articulate the interests and self-understanding of those classes, has been enormously influential in debates about the role of the intellectual in political life.

For Gramsci, every social class produces its own organic intellectuals: the capitalist class produces its economists, lawyers, and journalists who develop and disseminate the ideological frameworks through which capitalist social relations are represented as natural and inevitable; the working class must produce its own organic intellectuals who can articulate the experience and interests of the working class, develop the conceptual frameworks for understanding its situation, and contribute to the project of building the institutional foundations for an alternative social order.

The concept of the organic intellectual has been extensively debated and critiqued since Gramsci first developed it, and various scholars have proposed modifications and extensions of the concept. Edward Said's concept of the "secular intellectual," which draws partly on Gramsci but

also on other traditions, emphasizes the intellectual's obligation to speak truth to power, to refuse complicity with established authority, and to maintain a critical distance from all forms of power, including those of the class or movement that the intellectual is aligned with. Aijaz Ahmad, in his debate with Said about the politics of postcolonial intellectual practice, has argued for a more explicitly class-based conception of intellectual commitment that is closer to Gramsci's original formulation.

For Abdul Kafi, the question of the intellectual's role in political struggle is not merely theoretical. He is a scholar whose institutional position, whose choice of texts and topics, whose coordination of the Centre for Marxian Studies, whose publication with the National Book Agency, all represent specific choices about what kind of intellectual to be and what kind of scholarly community to contribute to. These choices are political in the Gramscian sense: they are choices about how to use the specific skills and resources of the scholar in relation to the broader project of social and political transformation.

9.3 The Politics of Secularism in Contemporary India

The question of secularism is one of the most politically charged in contemporary Indian intellectual life, and it is directly relevant to the situation of Muslim Bengali intellectuals like Abdul Kafi. The Indian model of secularism, described in the Constitution as the principle that the state shall not discriminate on grounds of religion, is a specific historical construct that has been contested from multiple directions since independence.

From the Hindu nationalist perspective, Indian secularism is criticized as a form of "pseudo-secularism" that is biased against Hinduism, that grants special privileges to Muslim and Christian minorities in the name of protecting minority rights, and that therefore discriminates against the Hindu majority. This critique, which has been central to BJP and RSS political mobilization since at least the 1980s, provides the ideological foundation for the project of Hindu nationalist cultural politics that the Modi government has pursued since 2014.

From the progressive and Marxian perspective, Indian secularism has been criticized not for its alleged anti-Hindu bias but for its failure to adequately address the material bases of communal conflict. The Marxian analysis of secularism emphasizes that religious communalism is not primarily a matter of theological difference but a political phenomenon rooted in economic competition and in the manipulation of religious identity by political elites for electoral advantage. Genuine secularism, in this view, requires not merely formal constitutional neutrality toward religion but active policies to address the material inequalities between communities, to combat the political mobilization of religious identity for sectarian purposes, and to build the forms of class solidarity that can transcend communal divisions.

This debate about secularism has very specific implications for the situation of Muslim Bengali intellectuals in contemporary West Bengal. The growth of BJP influence in West Bengal, the communal polarization that BJP political mobilization has generated, and the vulnerability of the Muslim minority to the violence and discrimination that communal politics produces: all of these are immediate political realities that shape the context within which Kafi and scholars like him work. The defense of secularism, in this context, is not merely an abstract philosophical

commitment but a practical political necessity for anyone who is committed to maintaining the conditions of genuinely free intellectual inquiry and genuinely pluralist cultural life.

9.4 Populism, Democracy, and the Challenge to Left Politics

The rise of populist politics globally, and specifically the rise of Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress in West Bengal and the BJP nationally, raises important questions about the relationship between left politics and democratic mobilization. The Left Front's defeat in 2011 was not simply a result of its specific policy failures. It also reflected a deeper problem in the left's relationship to democratic politics: a tendency to prioritize institutional and organizational control over genuine responsiveness to the demands and aspirations of the people it claimed to represent.

The political theorist Ernesto Laclau's analysis of populism in "On Populist Reason" (2005) offers a framework for understanding these dynamics that is relevant to the Indian left's situation. Laclau argues that populism is not simply a form of political manipulation or demagoguery but a fundamental logic of political mobilization that constructs a "people" through the articulation of diverse demands against a common antagonist identified as the establishment or the elite. This analysis helps explain both the success of populist political formations and the challenges they pose for the traditional left, which has tended to privilege class-based mobilization over the more fluid and heterogeneous forms of popular identity that populism constructs.

The implications of these developments for the tradition of Marxian intellectual culture that Kafi represents are profound. If left politics is to renew itself and find a way back to political relevance in West Bengal and in India more broadly, it will need to engage seriously both with the theoretical debates about populism, democracy, and political mobilization and with the specific material grievances and cultural aspirations of the communities it seeks to represent. This is a political and an intellectual challenge, and the Centre for Marxian Studies, under Kafi's coordination, has a role to play in developing the analytical resources for meeting it.

CHAPTER TEN: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES: BENGALI INTELLECTUAL CULTURE IN GLOBAL CONTEXT

10.1 Postcolonial Theory and Its Discontents

The tradition of postcolonial theory, associated primarily with figures like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, has been enormously influential in reshaping the terms within which the intellectual cultures of formerly colonized societies are analyzed in the global academy. This tradition has produced important insights about the cultural dimensions of colonialism, about the construction of colonial knowledge, about the persistence of colonial structures and mentalities in the postcolonial period, and about the specific challenges facing intellectuals from formerly colonized societies who work within institutions and with theoretical frameworks that were developed in the context of Western colonial modernity.

But postcolonial theory has also been subjected to substantial and in many respects compelling critiques from within the Marxian tradition. The most systematic of these critiques is Vivek Chibber's "Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital" (2013), a book that Chibber presented at the Centre for Marxian Studies at Jadavpur University, which makes the case that postcolonial theory, particularly in its Subaltern Studies variant, systematically misrepresents the nature of capitalism and therefore provides an inadequate framework for understanding the history of colonialism and the prospects for postcolonial social transformation. Chibber argues that postcolonial theory's tendency to emphasize the cultural uniqueness of non-Western societies and to challenge the universalism of Marxian categories leads it to abandon precisely those analytical tools that are most powerful for understanding the global dynamics of capitalism and imperialism.

This debate is not merely academic. It has direct implications for the kind of intellectual work that scholars like Abdul Kafi do and for the tradition of Marxian literary scholarship that they represent. The question of whether to work within the frameworks of postcolonial theory, with their emphasis on cultural difference and the critique of Eurocentrism, or within the frameworks of Marxian political economy, with their emphasis on the universal dynamics of capitalism and class struggle, is one that every scholar in this tradition must engage with. Kafi's work, in its insistence on the Marxian framework while engaging seriously with the specific cultural and historical dimensions of the Bengali context, represents a particular position in this ongoing debate.

10.2 World Literature and the Problem of Peripherality

The concept of "world literature," first articulated by Goethe in 1827 and most influentially theorized in recent years by Franco Moretti and David Damrosch, raises important questions about the relationship between Bengali literary culture and the global literary system. Moretti's "world-systems" approach to literature, drawing on Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory, describes a global literary system organized around a core of dominant literary cultures (primarily Western European and North American) and a periphery of marginal literary cultures that must negotiate their relationship to the core on asymmetrical terms.

Bengali literary culture occupies a complex and somewhat paradoxical position within this global literary system. On the one hand, the Bengali literary tradition is one of the richest and most extensive in the world, with a history stretching back centuries and a body of work that includes figures of genuine world-historical significance, most notably Tagore. On the other hand, Bengali literature circulates in the global literary market in highly selective and distorted ways. The portions of Bengali literary culture that achieve global circulation tend to be those that are most accessible to Western readers, most translatable into the dominant aesthetic frameworks of the global literary market, and most compatible with the Orientalist expectations that global readers bring to South Asian literature.

The implications of this situation for the tradition of Bengali Marxian literary scholarship are significant. The kind of work that Kafi does, scholarship written in Bengali, addressing Bengali texts, aimed at a Bengali audience, and working within the specific tradition of Bengali Marxian intellectual culture, is largely invisible within the global academic market. It does not circulate in

the English-language journals and publishing houses that define intellectual prestige in the global academy. It does not engage with the theoretical debates that are currently dominant in Western literary studies. It does not speak to the concerns of the anglophone readers who constitute the primary consumers of "world literature" in the global literary system.

This invisibility is not merely a pragmatic problem of limited reach. It is a form of epistemic injustice that reflects the structural inequality of the global academic market. The work that Kafi and scholars like him do is not of lesser intellectual quality or significance than work produced in the dominant languages of the global academy. It is, rather, the work of a tradition that has not been granted the institutional resources and the platform recognition that would allow it to participate as an equal in global intellectual debate. This structural inequality is itself a political problem, one that the tradition of Bengali Marxian intellectual culture that Kafi represents is well-positioned to analyze, even as it is also one of the primary victims of the inequality it analyzes.

10.3 Latin America, Africa, and the Global South: Comparative Intellectual Traditions

The tradition of Marxian literary scholarship in Bengal does not exist in isolation from other Marxian intellectual traditions in the global South. The Centre for Marxian Studies' engagement with figures like Samir Amin and Vijay Prashad reflects a genuine internationalism that connects Bengali Marxian scholarship to broader intellectual networks and traditions.

The Latin American tradition of dependency theory and liberation theology offers important comparative perspectives for understanding the Bengali situation. Dependency theory, developed by scholars like Andre Gunder Frank, Celso Furtado, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso in the 1960s and 1970s, analyzed the underdevelopment of Latin American economies not as a failure to follow the path of Western capitalist development but as a product of the specific integration of Latin American economies into the global capitalist system in a position of dependency. This analysis resonates strongly with the Indian tradition of colonial underdevelopment theory associated with figures like Dadabhai Naoroji, R.C. Dutt, and more recently Utsa Patnaik, and it provides a global framework within which the specific Bengali experience of colonial economic exploitation can be situated.

Liberation theology, the Latin American theological tradition that emerged in the 1960s and that combined Catholic theology with Marxian social analysis in the service of the liberation of the poor, offers a different but related perspective that is relevant to the specific situation of Muslim Bengali intellectuals working in the Marxian tradition. The liberation theologians, including Gustavo Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff, and Jon Sobrino, demonstrated that religious faith and Marxian political commitment are not necessarily in tension, that the deepest resources of the religious tradition can be deployed in the service of the struggle for social justice rather than in its defense of the existing order. For a Muslim Bengali Marxist like Kafi, this tradition offers an analogy, though not a direct parallel, to the challenge of reconciling religious identity with political commitment to the left.

The African tradition of pan-African Marxism, associated with figures like Amilcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, and Walter Rodney, offers yet another set of comparative perspectives. Fanon's

analysis in "The Wretched of the Earth" (1961) of the psychology of colonized peoples and the dynamics of anti-colonial revolution has been extraordinarily influential across the global South and remains one of the most powerful analyses of the relationship between colonial domination, psychological deformation, and the possibilities of liberation. Cabral's theory of "the weapon of culture" as an instrument of anti-colonial resistance, and his analysis of the role of the revolutionary intellectual in reconnecting with the cultural resources of the colonized people, raises questions directly relevant to the tradition of Bengali Marxian intellectual culture.

10.4 The Global Crisis of the Left and the Tasks of Marxian Scholarship

The crisis of the left is not specific to India or to Bengal. It is a global phenomenon that has been underway since at least the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and it has been intensified by the rise of right-wing populism and authoritarian nationalism across the world in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Understanding the specific Bengali dimensions of this crisis requires situating them within the global context, and vice versa.

The rise of neoliberal capitalism as the dominant global ideology since the 1980s, and the subordination of virtually all social institutions, including universities, publishing houses, and cultural organizations, to the logic of market competition and profit maximization, has created a structural environment that is deeply hostile to the kind of intellectually engaged, politically committed, publicly oriented scholarship that Kafi's work represents. The marketization of higher education, the pressure on academics to pursue research that will attract external funding and generate commercially viable outputs, the assessment of scholarly quality primarily through citation metrics and journal rankings that systematically disadvantage non-anglophone scholarship: all of these developments create material pressures that bear down on the practice of Marxian literary scholarship in ways that no amount of ideological commitment can simply wish away.

At the same time, the global crisis of the left has generated significant new theoretical work that is directly relevant to the renewal of Marxian literary scholarship. The work of theorists like David Harvey on the political economy of neoliberalism and space, Wendy Brown on the erosion of democratic citizenship by neoliberal rationality, Nancy Fraser on the relationship between redistribution and recognition in feminist and socialist politics, and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri on the new forms of global capitalist power and the possibilities of counter-power from below: all of these represent significant contributions to the Marxian tradition that provide new analytical tools for understanding the contemporary moment and the possibilities of intellectual and political resistance within it.

The task of Marxian literary scholarship in this context is not to apply these new theoretical developments mechanically to the analysis of Bengali literary texts but to use them as resources for deepening and extending the tradition of engaged literary criticism that scholars like Kafi represent. This requires both theoretical rigor and historical sensitivity, both a command of the latest developments in Marxian thought and a deep familiarity with the specific literary and cultural traditions that Bengali Marxian scholarship addresses.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE QUESTION OF WHAT LITERATURE IS FOR

11.1 Literature, Human Nature, and the Claims of Political Philosophy

A Marxian literary scholarship of the kind that Abdul Kafi represents makes implicit claims not only about the specific texts it analyzes but about the nature of literature as a form of human activity and about what literature is for. These claims are philosophical in the deepest sense: they involve questions about human nature, about the relationship between individual consciousness and social life, about the forms of understanding and experience that literature uniquely makes possible, and about the relationship between aesthetic value and political significance.

The philosophical anthropology implicit in Kafi's approach to literary scholarship draws on several traditions. From the Marxian tradition, it draws the insight that human beings are fundamentally social, that their nature is not given in advance but produced through the specific social relations within which they live and labor, and that literature is therefore not merely an expression of an unchanging human nature but a form of social practice that is itself shaped by, and in turn shapes, the specific social relations of its historical context. From the tradition of philosophical hermeneutics, associated primarily with Gadamer and Ricoeur, it draws the insight that literary texts carry within them the accumulated wisdom of human experience across generations and that the reading of literature is a form of understanding that enriches and transforms the reader's self-understanding. From the tradition of feminist and postcolonial theory, it draws the insistence that questions of who produces literature, who reads it, and whose experiences it represents are not incidental to its significance but constitutive of it.

The synthesis of these philosophical traditions into a coherent approach to literary scholarship is not straightforward. There are genuine tensions between the Marxian insistence on the social determination of consciousness and the hermeneutic tradition's emphasis on the creative freedom of interpretation. There are genuine tensions between the universalism implicit in claims about literature's capacity to represent human experience and the particularity insisted on by postcolonial and feminist critics who emphasize the specific social location of both literary production and literary reception. Navigating these tensions requires not a simple resolution but a sustained dialectical engagement that holds them together in productive tension.

11.2 The Aesthetic and the Political: Can They Be Unified?

One of the most persistent and most practically important questions in Marxian literary aesthetics is whether the aesthetic value of a literary work and its political significance can be understood within a single coherent framework, or whether they pull in different directions, requiring different and potentially incompatible criteria of evaluation.

The orthodox Marxian position, at least in its Leninist and Stalinist variants, was to subordinate aesthetic to political criteria: a work was good if it served the revolution, and the qualities that made it aesthetically powerful were valuable insofar as they served political ends. This position was institutionalized in the doctrine of socialist realism and produced a significant body of politically committed but aesthetically mediocre work. It also, as the history of Soviet cultural

politics demonstrates, created the conditions for systematic suppression of artistic work that did not conform to political requirements.

The tradition of Western Marxian aesthetics, associated with figures like Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, and Ernst Bloch, developed a very different position: that the aesthetic value of a literary work and its political significance are genuinely related but cannot be reduced to each other, that the best politically committed literature achieves its political significance precisely through its aesthetic achievement, and that the reduction of aesthetic value to political utility destroys both.

Adorno's position, the most rigorous and most demanding in this tradition, holds that genuine art has a form of "negative knowledge" of society: it preserves, in its aesthetic form, a critique of the existing order that is more powerful precisely because it is not articulated as a political argument but as an aesthetic experience. The dissonance and difficulty of modernist art, in Adorno's view, is not a failure of communication but a form of integrity: it refuses the false reconciliation that conventional aesthetic forms offer, maintaining instead the tension and the unresolvedness of social contradiction.

For a Marxian literary scholar working with texts like *Raktakarobi*, which combines extraordinary aesthetic power with explicit political significance, or *Dhumketu*, which uses literary form in the service of explicit political agitation, these questions are not merely theoretical. They require specific critical decisions about how to read the texts, what to attend to and what to bracket, how to understand the relationship between the formal and the thematic dimensions of literary work and between both of these and the historical and political context within which the work was produced and received.

11.3 Memory, Archive, and the Future of Bengali Literary Culture

Any comprehensive account of the tradition of Bengali literary scholarship must engage with the question of how that tradition is remembered, preserved, and transmitted. The archive of Bengali literary culture, the accumulated texts, manuscripts, journals, newspapers, letters, and institutional records that document the history of Bengali intellectual life, is itself a political artifact, shaped by the specific choices of those who have had the power to determine what is preserved and what is lost, what is highlighted and what is allowed to fade into obscurity.

The work of archiving, of making accessible the textual record of Bengali literary and intellectual culture, is itself a form of scholarly activism. The texts that Kafi analyzes, *Dhumketu*, *Raktakarobi*, *Langol*, are themselves the products of specific decisions about what to preserve and what to discard, what to republish and what to allow to go out of print. The National Book Agency's commitment to republishing and keeping in print the texts of the Marxian and progressive literary tradition is itself a form of cultural politics, an assertion that these texts remain relevant and worthy of engagement, that the tradition they represent is still alive and still speaks to contemporary concerns.

The digital revolution has created new possibilities for the preservation and dissemination of Bengali literary culture. Digital archives, online databases, and digital publishing platforms can

in principle make the full extent of Bengali literary and intellectual culture accessible to readers anywhere in the world, bypassing the traditional gatekeepers of the publishing industry and the academic establishment. But the digitization of Bengali cultural heritage also raises important questions about intellectual property, about the economic models that can sustain digital cultural production, and about the power relations that are encoded in the specific design of digital platforms and search algorithms.

For Kafi's scholarly work specifically, the question of digital accessibility is both a practical and a political one. His writing in Bengali is largely inaccessible to non-Bengali-speaking scholars and to the global academic market. The translation of his work into English, or its digitization and online dissemination in a form that would allow machine translation or scholarly translation, would increase its accessibility but would also involve choices about how to mediate between the specific intellectual culture of Bengali Marxian scholarship and the different presuppositions and expectations of a global academic audience. These choices are not neutral. They involve decisions about what aspects of the work to emphasize and what to simplify, about whose frameworks of understanding to privilege, and about the relationship between the local and the global in the circulation of intellectual culture.

11.4 Critical Pedagogy, the Classroom, and the Formation of Future Scholars

The final dimension of Abdul Kafi's intellectual work that deserves sustained attention in this Part is his work as a teacher. The chapter on the philosophy of education would be incomplete without a sustained reflection on what goes on in the Bengali literature classroom at Jadavpur University, on what it means to transmit a tradition of Marxian literary scholarship to the next generation of students, and on the relationship between critical pedagogy and political formation.

The tradition of critical pedagogy, associated in the English-language literature primarily with Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (1968), holds that education is never politically neutral, that every pedagogical practice either reinforces the existing social order or contributes to its transformation, and that genuinely emancipatory education requires a different kind of relationship between teacher and student than the conventional "banking" model in which knowledge is deposited into passive student receptacles. Freire's insistence on dialogue, on the recognition of the student's own experience and knowledge as a legitimate starting point for learning, and on the transformation of the educational relationship into a collaborative inquiry, has inspired generations of progressive educators globally.

In the specific context of the Bengali Department at Jadavpur University, the tradition of critical pedagogy takes specific forms that are shaped by the history and culture of the institution. The culture of political engagement and intellectual debate that characterizes Jadavpur University creates a classroom environment that is in many respects already more dialogical and more politically engaged than most university classrooms. Students at Jadavpur have historically felt empowered to challenge their teachers, to bring their own political commitments and life experiences into the classroom, and to expect that education will engage with the real questions of their social world rather than retreating into academic abstraction.

But this culture also creates challenges for the teacher who is trying to transmit a specific intellectual tradition while also respecting the independence and the critical capacities of students. The relationship between tradition and innovation in pedagogy, between the transmission of an inherited body of knowledge and method and the cultivation of the student's capacity for original thought and critical engagement, is one of the most important and most difficult problems in educational philosophy. It is a problem that Kafi must navigate every day in his classroom, and it is a problem that the tradition of Marxian literary scholarship addresses explicitly, through its insistence that the purpose of intellectual work is not the mere reproduction of existing knowledge but its transformation in the service of a more just and more fully human world.

CHAPTER TWELVE: TOWARD A SYNTHESIS: KAFI'S INTELLECTUAL CONTRIBUTION IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

12.1 What Makes a Tradition Live

A tradition of intellectual inquiry is not merely the sum of the texts and ideas that it has produced. It is a living practice of questioning, arguing, revising, and extending a set of core commitments in response to changing historical conditions and new intellectual challenges. The vitality of a tradition is measured not by its faithfulness to its founding texts but by its capacity to generate new questions, to engage seriously with challenges to its established positions, and to produce genuine insights into the problems it addresses.

The Bengali Marxian literary tradition that Abdul Kafi represents is, by this measure, a living tradition. It has not stood still since the days of the progressive writers movement or the founding of the Centre for Marxian Studies. It has engaged with the challenges of postcolonial theory, of feminist criticism, of poststructuralist theory, of the global crisis of Marxism in the aftermath of 1989. It has maintained its core commitments while revising their specific articulations in light of new theoretical and historical developments. And it has done so while remaining rooted in the specific intellectual culture of Bengali academia, refusing both the temptation of pure theoretical abstraction and the temptation of mere empiricism.

What gives this tradition its vitality is not any single theoretical formula or programmatic commitment but a set of intellectual virtues that are cultivated and transmitted through the practice of the tradition itself. These virtues include: the commitment to historical specificity, the refusal to analyze texts without attending to the specific historical and social conditions of their production and reception; the commitment to materialist analysis, the insistence on connecting the analysis of culture and ideas to the analysis of the economic and social structures within which they are produced; the commitment to the complexity of the relationship between base and superstructure, the refusal of both economic reductionism and cultural idealism; the commitment to internationalism, the insistence on situating specific intellectual traditions within the global context of capitalist development and anti-capitalist struggle; and the commitment to political engagement, the refusal to treat intellectual work as a purely academic exercise divorced from the demands of political practice.

12.2 Kafi's Specific Contribution: Text, History, and Commitment

Within this living tradition, what is Abdul Kafi's specific contribution? The question requires a degree of caution and tentativeness, given the relative inaccessibility of his primary texts in English and the necessarily incomplete picture of his work that this textbook can provide based on the available evidence. But even from that incomplete picture, certain distinctive features of his intellectual project emerge with sufficient clarity to allow some tentative characterization.

First, Kafi is a scholar who is deeply committed to the specific texts of the Bengali literary tradition as the primary objects of scholarly attention. He is not primarily a theorist who uses literary texts as illustrations of theoretical propositions but a literary critic who uses theoretical frameworks as tools for illuminating specific texts. This textual orientation is not anti-theoretical. It requires a sophisticated theoretical apparatus to execute well. But it keeps theory in its proper place as a means rather than an end, as a resource for understanding rather than an end in itself.

Second, Kafi is a scholar who insists on the historical specificity of the texts he analyzes. His choice to bring together Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol in a single analytical framework reflects an understanding that these texts belong to the same historical moment, the early 1920s in Bengal, and that analyzing them together illuminates dimensions of each that would be less visible if they were analyzed in isolation. This historical sensitivity connects the analysis of specific texts to the broader question of how literary culture participates in the historical process, how it both reflects and contributes to the making of history.

Third, Kafi is a scholar whose intellectual work is inseparable from his institutional commitments. His coordination of the Centre for Marxian Studies, his work in the Bengali Department, his involvement in cultural activities like the Sishu-kishore Utsav: all of these are dimensions of an intellectual practice that refuses the separation of thought and action, of scholarly work and political engagement, that academic professionalization has tended to enforce. This is, in the deepest sense, a Gramscian intellectual practice: one that understands the work of the organic intellectual as necessarily combining theoretical analysis, institutional building, and cultural practice in a unified project.

12.3 Recent Developments: The Contemporary Moment in Bengali Marxian Scholarship (2024-2026)

The years 2024 to 2026 have brought new pressures and new possibilities for the tradition of Bengali Marxian scholarship that Kafi represents. The political situation in West Bengal continues to be shaped by the dominance of the Trinamool Congress government and the growing presence of the BJP, creating a political environment in which the left is struggling to maintain its relevance and its organizational presence. The ongoing crisis of higher education funding in India, with the central government pushing for greater commercialization of universities and a reduction in public subsidy for higher education, creates material pressures on institutions like Jadavpur University that directly affect the conditions under which scholars like Kafi work.

At the same time, there are signs of renewal within the Bengali Marxian intellectual tradition. The Centre for Marxian Studies continues to function as an important forum for interdisciplinary engagement with Marxian ideas, bringing together scholars from across India and from around the world. The tradition of left-wing publishing in Bengal, while under commercial pressure, has not collapsed. And the student movements at Jadavpur and other universities, which have continued to challenge both institutional conservatism and the growing influence of Hindu nationalist politics in educational institutions, testify to the persistence of a radical democratic political culture among young Bengalis that the Marxian tradition has historically helped to form and sustain.

The broader global context of 2025-2026 also offers both challenges and opportunities for the renewal of Marxian intellectual culture. The accelerating climate crisis has given new urgency to critiques of capitalist development and to demands for a fundamental transformation of the economic system. The global pandemic of the early 2020s demonstrated in vivid and painful ways the inadequacy of market-based approaches to public health and social welfare, strengthening the case for forms of collective provision and public investment that have historically been associated with socialist and social-democratic politics. And the rise of artificial intelligence as a transformative economic force is creating new questions about labor, value, and the social organization of production that classical Marxian economic analysis is particularly well-positioned to illuminate.

These global developments create a new context for Kafi's ongoing intellectual work and for the tradition of Bengali Marxian scholarship that he represents. The questions that Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol raised in 1922 about the relationship between capitalism and human liberation, between cultural expression and political struggle, between the specific experience of a colonized people and the universal demands of human dignity, remain urgently relevant in 2026. The tradition of scholarship that takes these questions seriously, that refuses the false consolations of either market triumphalism or nostalgic romanticism, and that insists on the possibility of a world organized around human needs rather than capital accumulation, is not a relic of the past. It is a living intellectual tradition that has important contributions to make to the largest questions of the present moment.

12.4 The Future of the Tradition: Problems, Possibilities, and Responsibilities

Any serious engagement with the tradition of Bengali Marxian literary scholarship must conclude by acknowledging honestly the problems and challenges that it faces, as well as the possibilities it contains. To do otherwise would be to engage in exactly the kind of false consciousness that Marxian analysis has always sought to expose.

The problems are real. The global dominance of English as the language of academic prestige creates a structural disadvantage for scholarship produced in Bengali. The commercial pressures on publishing undermine the institutional foundations of left-wing intellectual culture. The political marginalization of the Indian left reduces the audience and the institutional support for Marxian scholarship. The growing influence of Hindu nationalist cultural politics in Indian universities creates a climate of pressure and intimidation that constrains the possibilities of genuinely free intellectual inquiry. And the specific situation of Muslim Bengali intellectuals in

contemporary West Bengal, in a context of rising communal tensions and BJP political mobilization, creates personal and professional vulnerabilities that are not merely abstract concerns.

The possibilities are also real. The tradition of Bengali Marxian literary scholarship commands extraordinary intellectual resources. It can draw on a rich literary tradition, a sophisticated body of theoretical tools, a history of genuine engagement with the largest questions of political philosophy and cultural theory, and a set of institutional foundations, however embattled, that continue to support serious intellectual work. It speaks to questions that are urgently relevant to the contemporary moment: questions about capitalism and its discontents, about the possibilities of human liberation, about the relationship between culture and politics, about the claims of universalism and the realities of particularity. These are questions that no amount of neoliberal triumphalism or nationalist mystification can make go away.

The responsibilities are correspondingly large. A tradition that claims to speak in the name of human liberation is held to a higher standard of intellectual honesty and political integrity than one that merely seeks to describe and explain the world as it is. The responsibility of scholars like Abdul Kafi is not merely to produce good scholarship but to ensure that that scholarship serves the purposes for which the tradition of Marxian intellectual inquiry exists: not the accumulation of academic prestige or the advancement of individual careers but the development of the analytical and critical tools that make possible a more adequate understanding of the world and therefore a more effective struggle for its transformation.

This is a demanding standard, and it is one that the tradition itself provides the resources for meeting. The best of Bengali Marxian literary scholarship, from the founding generation of the progressive movement to the contemporary practitioners of which Kafi is a notable example, has met this standard not by pretending that the demands of intellectual rigor and political commitment are always in harmony but by working, with honesty and discipline, to hold them together in productive tension. This is the legacy that the tradition bequeaths, and it is the responsibility that each new generation of practitioners inherits.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS TO PART FIVE: THE DIALECTIC AS HISTORICAL FORM

The twelve chapters of this Part have traced the dialectic of tradition and modernity in Bengali literary culture from Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay in the nineteenth century to the present moment of the twenty-first century. We have analyzed the specific contributions of the major figures and movements that constitute the tradition: Bankimchandra's construction of Bengali literary nationalism, Tagore's complex universalism and its political implications, Nazrul's revolutionary synthesis of Islamic social critique and Bengali radicalism, the progressive writers movement and the aesthetics of commitment, the literature of partition and its theoretical challenges, Manik Bandyopadhyay's psychological realism, and the economic, legal, philosophical, and political dimensions of the tradition as a whole.

Throughout this survey, we have kept in view the specific intellectual contribution of Abdul Kafi and the way in which his scholarly work both draws on and extends this tradition. We have analyzed the economic conditions of literary production in Bengal, the legal and constitutional framework within which Bengali cultural life operates, the political theory of the committed intellectual in Gramsci's sense, the comparative perspectives offered by parallel intellectual traditions in Latin America and Africa, and the philosophical anthropology implicit in the tradition of Marxian literary scholarship.

The central argument that has run through this Part can be stated as follows: the dialectic of tradition and modernity in Bengali literary culture is not a simple opposition between a static tradition and a dynamic modernity but a complex historical process in which tradition and modernity are mutually constitutive, in which each is shaped by its relationship to the other, and in which the specific forms of Bengali literary and intellectual culture are produced through the ongoing negotiation of this relationship in specific historical conditions. This dialectical understanding of the tradition provides the framework within which Abdul Kafi's scholarly work operates and from which it derives its significance.

The concept of the dialectic, as Hegel and Marx developed it, refers not merely to a logical form but to a historical form, to the way in which contradictions within a social and historical formation are not merely coexistent but generative, producing through their tension the conditions for new forms of thought, new social possibilities, and new historical developments. The dialectic of tradition and modernity in Bengali literary culture has been historically generative in precisely this sense. The tension between the demands of a colonial modernity and the resources of an indigenous tradition has produced forms of literary and intellectual creativity that are neither simply traditional nor simply modern but something genuinely new, something that would not have been possible without both the pressure of the colonial encounter and the resistance that the inherited tradition enabled.

Understanding Abdul Kafi's work within this dialectical framework means understanding it not as a simple product of its tradition but as a creative response to the specific tensions and possibilities of the tradition in the current historical moment. His insistence on the Marxian analysis of Bengali literary culture, his commitment to the specific texts of Nazrul and Tagore as objects of scholarly attention, his coordination of an interdisciplinary forum for Marxian thought at one of India's most significant universities: all of these are specific ways of engaging with the dialectic of tradition and modernity that is the life force of the Bengali intellectual tradition. They are forms of intellectual practice that are simultaneously rooted in a specific history and genuinely open to the future, simultaneously local in their immediate concerns and universal in their ultimate aspirations.

The tradition of Bengali Marxian literary scholarship is not simply a regional variant of a global Marxian project. It is a specific intellectual formation with its own history, its own forms of argument, its own objects of attention, and its own relationship to political life, and it makes its own specific and distinctive contributions to the global project of understanding the world in order to transform it. Understanding that contribution requires the kind of sustained, historically informed, theoretically sophisticated, and politically engaged analysis that this textbook has

attempted to provide. It requires, in other words, precisely the kind of scholarship that the tradition itself at its best has always exemplified.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Analyze the relationship between Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's Hindu nationalism and the contemporary politics of Hindu nationalist cultural mobilization under the BJP. What historical continuities and discontinuities can be identified, and what do they suggest about the relationship between nineteenth-century literary nationalism and twenty-first-century political nationalism?
2. How does Tagore's critique of nationalism in his 1917 essays compare with contemporary critiques of nationalism from within the global left? What does the comparison reveal about the persistent tensions between universalist political philosophy and the specific demands of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist politics?
3. Analyze the relationship between Nazrul's religious universalism and the demands of secular left politics in contemporary India. Is religious universalism a viable political position in the current context of Hindu nationalist mobilization, or does it require supplementation by a more explicitly secular and class-based politics?
4. Compare the Indian progressive writers movement of the 1930s and 1940s with analogous literary and cultural movements in Latin America (e.g., the Boom literature) and Africa (e.g., the Negritude movement). What do the comparisons reveal about the specific contributions and limitations of politically engaged literary movements?
5. Apply Manik Bandyopadhyay's psychological realism to the analysis of a contemporary Bengali literary work of your choice. What aspects of the social and psychological condition of contemporary Bengali society does the text illuminate, and how does it compare with Manik's depictions of mid-twentieth-century Bengal?
6. Analyze the partition of 1947 and its literary aftermath using both the Marxian framework of class analysis and the postcolonial framework of cultural identity and trauma. What are the specific insights and limitations of each framework, and how might they be combined in a more adequate account?
7. Evaluate the Gramscian concept of the organic intellectual as a framework for understanding Abdul Kafi's scholarly and institutional role. What are the specific forms that organic intellectual practice takes in the context of twenty-first-century Bengali academic life?
8. Analyze the political economy of the Bengali publishing industry, comparing the model represented by the National Book Agency with the model of commercial publishing. What are the implications of these different models for the kind of intellectual work they are able to support?
9. How should the tradition of Bengali Marxian literary scholarship engage with the challenges posed by the global dominance of English as the language of academic prestige? What are the arguments for maintaining scholarly work in Bengali, and what are the arguments for greater engagement with the global anglophone academy?
10. Assess the current state of the Indian left in West Bengal, drawing on both historical analysis and contemporary political developments. What resources does the tradition of

Bengali Marxian intellectual culture offer for the renewal of left politics, and what are the specific obstacles that renewal faces?

11. Analyze the relationship between literature and law using specific examples from the Bengali literary tradition. How do literary texts both reflect and critique the legal frameworks within which they are produced and received?
12. Compare the philosophical anthropology implicit in the tradition of Bengali Marxian literary scholarship with the philosophical anthropology of liberal individualism. What are the specific points of disagreement, and what are the implications of these disagreements for the understanding of literature's role in human life?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

On Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and Bengali literary nationalism: Partha Chatterjee's "The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories" (1993) provides the most sophisticated theoretical analysis of the specific form of Bengali nationalism. Sudipta Kaviraj's "The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India" (1995) provides a detailed literary-theoretical analysis of Bankimchandra's major works and their political implications. Tanika Sarkar's "Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism" (2001) analyzes the specific role of gender in the construction of Hindu nationalist identity in colonial Bengal.

On Rabindranath Tagore: Rabindranath Tagore's "Nationalism" (1917), available in various reprint editions, is the essential primary text for his political philosophy. Sisir Kumar Das's "The Artist in Chains: The Life of Bankimchandra Chatterji" and "A History of Indian Literature" provide comprehensive scholarly accounts of the Bengali literary tradition. Amartya Sen's "The Argumentative Indian" includes an important essay on Tagore's intellectual legacy and its relevance to contemporary India. Rustom Bharucha's "Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin" provides an important analysis of Tagore's Asian universalism.

On Kazi Nazrul Islam: Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal's edited volume "Encountering Kali" provides important background for understanding the religious dimensions of Nazrul's work. Kazi Nazrul Islam's poetry in English translation is available in Kabir Chowdhury's "Selected Poems of Kazi Nazrul Islam." The journal "Nazrul Review" provides scholarly analysis of Nazrul's literary and political significance.

On the Progressive Writers Movement: Carlo Coppola's "Urdu and Hindi Short Stories" provides an introduction to the progressive literary tradition in Urdu and Hindi that is relevant as a comparative context for the Bengali progressive movement. Aijaz Ahmad's "In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures" (1992) provides the most systematic Marxian analysis of the postcolonial literary field and includes important discussions of the progressive tradition. Sumit Sarkar's "Modern India 1885-1947" provides the essential historical context for the progressive movement.

On partition literature: Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin's "Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition" provides an important account of women's experience of partition. Urvashi Butalia's "The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India" is a landmark work of oral history and literary analysis. Sukrita Paul Kumar and Akber Hyder's edited volume "Ismat: Her Life, Her Times" provides a useful comparative context. Veena Das's "Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary" provides a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between extreme violence and everyday life.

On Manik Bandyopadhyay: Alokeranjan Dasgupta's critical work on Manik provides the perspective of a scholar who knew the tradition from within. Meenakshi Mukherjee's "The Twice Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English" provides a comparative framework that includes Manik within the broader context of Indian fiction.

On Gramsci and the organic intellectual: Antonio Gramsci's "Selections from the Prison Notebooks," edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, is the essential primary text. Joseph Buttigieg's three-volume translation of the complete "Prison Notebooks" provides a more comprehensive account. Stuart Hall's essays on Gramsci, collected in "Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies," provide an important account of Gramsci's relevance for cultural studies and postcolonial theory.

On world literature and the global literary system: Franco Moretti's "Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900" and his essays collected in "Distant Reading" (2013) provide the most systematic account of his world-systems approach to literary history. David Damrosch's "What Is World Literature?" (2003) provides an alternative and more sympathetic account of the circulation of literature across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Emily Apter's "Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability" (2013) provides the most sustained critique of the world literature concept from the perspective of translation theory and linguistic politics.

On Latin American dependency theory and liberation theology: Gustavo Gutierrez's "A Theology of Liberation" (1973) is the founding text of liberation theology. Andre Gunder Frank's "Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America" (1967) provides the foundational statement of dependency theory. Frantz Fanon's "The Wretched of the Earth" (1961), with its preface by Jean-Paul Sartre and its introduction by Homi Bhabha (in the 2004 Grove Press edition), is essential for the comparative understanding of anti-colonial politics and intellectual practice.

On the contemporary crisis of the left in India: Prabhat Patnaik's collected essays, available through various Indian publishers, provide the most sustained Marxian economic analysis of contemporary Indian political economy. Utsa Patnaik and Sam Moyo's "The Agrarian Question in the Neoliberal Era" provides a global framework for understanding the agricultural crisis that has been central to the left's political difficulties in West Bengal. Arundhati Roy's "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness" (2017), while a novel rather than a work of political analysis, provides an extraordinarily vivid account of the social and political landscape of contemporary India.

APPENDIX TO PART FIVE: CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW OF BENGALI LITERARY HISTORY FROM BANKIMCHANDRA TO THE PRESENT

The following overview is intended as a reference tool for readers who want to situate the specific figures and works discussed in Part Five within the broader chronological framework of Bengali literary history.

1838: Birth of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, generally regarded as the father of the Bengali novel and the first major figure of Bengali literary modernity.

1861: Birth of Rabindranath Tagore, the most globally celebrated figure in Bengali literary and intellectual history.

1865-1891: Bankimchandra's major novelistic production, including "Durgeshnandini" (1865), "Kapalkuandala" (1866), "Bishbriksha" (1873), "Krishnakanter Will" (1878), and "Anandamath" (1882).

1875: Founding of the Brahmo Samaj journal "Tattwabodhini Patrika," which provided an important institutional platform for Bengali reformist thought.

1882: Composition of "Vande Mataram" by Bankimchandra, which would become one of the central anthems of Indian nationalism.

1894: Death of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay.

1899: Birth of Kazi Nazrul Islam.

1901-1910: Tagore's major early creative period, including the composition of many of his most celebrated songs and early plays.

1905: The first partition of Bengal by the British colonial government, which galvanized the Swadeshi movement and transformed the terms of Bengali nationalist politics.

1906: Founding of the Bengal Technical Institute (later to become Jadavpur University), as a nationalist alternative to colonial education.

1911: Annulment of the partition of Bengal following the Swadeshi movement's sustained campaign of resistance.

1913: Rabindranath Tagore awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, the first Asian writer to receive the award.

1917: Publication of Tagore's "Nationalism" essays, his most systematic critique of nationalist ideology.

1919: Jallianwala Bagh Massacre; Tagore returns his knighthood in protest.

1922: Kazi Nazrul Islam founds and begins editing Dhumketu.

1922-1924: Tagore writing and revising Raktakarobi (first draft 1923, published 1924).

1923: Dhumketu suspended by the British colonial government after Nazrul's seditious writing; Nazrul sentenced to prison.

1924: Publication of Raktakarobi by Rabindranath Tagore.

1925: Kazi Nazrul Islam edits Langol, the journal of the Labour Swaraj Party.

1936: Founding conference of the Progressive Writers Association in Lucknow.

1936: Publication of Manik Bandyopadhyay's "Padma Nadir Majhi" and "Putul Nacher Itikatha," two of the greatest Bengali novels.

1938: Founding of the Indian People's Theatre Association.

1939: Founding of the National Book Agency in Kolkata by Muzaffar Ahmad and associates.

1941: Death of Rabindranath Tagore.

1943: Bengal Famine; IPTA cultural response, including Bijon Bhattacharya's "Nabanna."

1947: Independence and partition of India and Bengal; massive displacement and violence.

1955: Establishment of Jadavpur University on 24 December.

1956: Beginning of the Department of Bengali at Jadavpur University.

1956: Death of Manik Bandyopadhyay.

1971: Bangladesh Liberation War; independence of Bangladesh.

1976: Death of Kazi Nazrul Islam.

1977: Left Front government comes to power in West Bengal, beginning thirty-four years of communist-led governance.

1995: Founding of the Centre for Marxian Studies at Jadavpur University.

2005: Abdul Kafi joins the Department of Bengali at Jadavpur University as Assistant Professor.

2008: Singur and Nandigram crises damage the Left Front's political standing.

2011: Left Front loses West Bengal state elections after thirty-four years; Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress comes to power.

2014: BJP wins national elections under Narendra Modi, beginning a period of Hindu nationalist cultural politics at the national level.

2019: Attack on Abdul Kafi by a former postgraduate student; widely reported in the Bengali and national press.

2019: BJP makes significant electoral gains in West Bengal in the Lok Sabha elections.

2021: Trinamool Congress wins West Bengal assembly elections, maintaining its position against BJP.

2024: Jadavpur University maintains its position in the top 10 of Indian universities in NIRF rankings.

2025-2026: Continuing pressures on Bengali Marxian intellectual culture from both commercial and political directions; Centre for Marxian Studies continues its work under Kafi's coordination.

This chronological overview is selective and cannot do justice to the full richness and complexity of Bengali literary history. It is intended merely as a reference framework that allows readers to situate the specific discussions in Part Five within their temporal context. For a comprehensive account of Bengali literary history, readers are directed to Sukumar Sen's "History of Bengali Literature" and to the scholarly resources listed in the Suggestions for Further Reading above.

End of Part Five

This textbook continues with Part Six: The Texts in Detail: A Close Reading of "Mrityuke Dak Jibon Pane: Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, Langol."

APPENDIX TO PART FIVE: GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS IN BENGALI LITERARY AND POLITICAL HISTORY

Bhadralok: The Bengali educated middle class, literally meaning "respectable people," who were the primary producers and consumers of Bengali literary and intellectual culture in the colonial and early postcolonial periods. The bhadralok were formed through the encounter between indigenous landed and professional classes and colonial modernity, and their specific class position, anxieties, and aspirations shaped the development of Bengali literary nationalism in decisive ways.

Brahmo Samaj: The reformist Hindu religious organization founded by Rammohan Roy in 1828, which played a central role in the Bengali Renaissance and the reform of Hindu social practices. The Brahmo Samaj's synthesis of Vedantic philosophy and Western rationalism provided one of the most important intellectual frameworks for the development of Bengali modernism.

Dhumketu: Literally "Comet," the Bengali political newspaper founded and edited by Kazi Nazrul Islam in 1922, which became one of the most explosive publications in Bengali journalism before being suppressed by the British colonial government. The name captures Nazrul's self-understanding as a disruptive, revolutionary force cutting through the existing social and political order.

Dhvani: The Sanskrit aesthetic concept of "suggestion" or "resonance" in poetic language, referring to the indirect communication of meaning through implication rather than direct statement. The theory of dhvani, developed by Anandavardhana and elaborated by Abhinavagupta, is central to the classical Sanskrit tradition of literary aesthetics and has been influential in the analysis of Bengali poetry.

Geeti: Bengali term for song, used in the specific compound "Nazrul Geeti" to refer to the body of songs composed by Kazi Nazrul Islam, which draw on both Hindu and Islamic musical and devotional traditions to create a distinctive synthetic form.

Jatra: The traditional form of Bengali popular theater, which uses a combination of dramatic performance, music, and elaborate staging to present both mythological stories and contemporary social dramas. The jatra tradition has been an important reference point for the Bengali progressive theater movement.

Kirtan: The devotional singing tradition associated with the Vaishnava bhakti movement, which is one of the most important musical traditions in Bengali culture and which Nazrul drew on extensively in developing his own musical style.

Langol: Literally "Plough," the journal of the Labour Swaraj Party edited by Kazi Nazrul Islam in 1925-1926. The title announces the journal's commitment to the interests of the peasantry and the laboring classes who work the land.

Left Front: The coalition of communist and left parties, led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), which governed West Bengal from 1977 to 2011, making it one of the longest-running democratically elected communist governments in world history.

Nabanna: Literally "New Harvest," the IPTA play written by Bijon Bhattacharya in 1944 about the Bengal Famine, which became one of the most celebrated examples of politically committed Bengali theater.

National Book Agency (NBA): The left-wing publishing house founded in Kolkata in 1939 by Muzaffar Ahmad and associates, which has been for more than eighty years the most important publisher of Marxian and progressive literature in the Bengali language.

Raktakarobi: Literally "Red Oleanders," the symbolic flower of resistance in Tagore's 1924 play of the same name, which depicts a dystopian city of gold mines in which human beings are reduced to numbered workers and in which the red oleander represents the persistence of natural vitality against the forces of industrial dehumanization.

Samaj: Bengali and Sanskrit term for society or community, used in various compounds (e.g., Brahmo Samaj, Maha Samaj) to designate social and religious organizations. The concept of samaj as organic community is central to the Bengali intellectual tradition's understanding of social life.

Swadeshi: Literally "own country," the term for the movement of economic and cultural nationalism that developed in Bengal in response to the partition of 1905, advocating the boycott of British goods and the promotion of Indian-made products. The Swadeshi movement had a significant impact on the development of Bengali literary and cultural nationalism.

Yakshapuri: The fictional city of gold mines in Tagore's Raktakarobi, derived from the Sanskrit mythological tradition of the Yakshas as spirits associated with wealth and the underground world. The name carries resonances of both the lure of material wealth and the uncanny, dehumanizing power that the pursuit of that wealth exerts.

End of Glossary

Part Six of this textbook will address: The Texts in Detail: A Close Reading of "Mrityuke Dak Jibon Pane: Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, Langol."

PART SIX: THE TEXTS IN DETAIL: A CLOSE READING OF "MRITYUKE DAK JIBON PANE: DHUMKETU, RAKTAKAROBI, LANGOL"

PREFACE TO PART SIX

We arrive now at the center of this textbook. The five preceding parts have assembled the intellectual, historical, philosophical, linguistic, political, and comparative apparatus necessary for a serious engagement with the primary objects of Abdul Kafi's most significant published scholarly work. We have traced the history of the institution within which he works, the philosophical tradition from which he draws, the literary history through which his objects of study must be understood, the politics of language that shapes the very conditions of his writing, and the global comparative context that allows us to situate his local intellectual practice within the widest possible frame. All of this preparation has had a single ultimate purpose: to enable a reading of Kafi's own scholarly texts that is equal to their complexity and their significance.

The book in question is published under a Bengali title that translates most naturally as "Summoning Death Toward Life" or "Calling Out to Death in the Direction of Life," with the

subtitle indicating its three primary objects of analysis: Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol. The title is itself philosophically charged, drawing on a specific moment in the history of Bengali radical literature when the confrontation with death, with the death of colonial subjugation, of economic exploitation, of human dignity destroyed by the industrial system, was understood as the necessary condition for the call toward genuine life. This dialectical structure of death and life, destruction and creation, negation and affirmation, runs through all three texts that Kafi analyzes and organizes his analysis of them.

Part Six is the longest and most technically detailed part of this textbook. It proceeds through a series of twelve chapters that together constitute a sustained close reading of Kafi's scholarship, attending at each stage to the specific analytical moves he makes, the theoretical frameworks he deploys, the historical evidence he marshals, and the larger philosophical and political claims his analysis is designed to support. The approach is simultaneously textual and contextual, attending to the specific language and form of the texts under analysis while situating them within the historical and intellectual contexts that give them their meaning and significance.

The chapters are organized in three groups of four, corresponding to the three texts that Kafi analyzes. Chapters One through Four address Dhumketu; Chapters Five through Eight address Raktakarobi; and Chapters Nine through Twelve address Langol. Each group begins with a chapter situating the text within its historical context, proceeds through chapters analyzing its specific content and form, and concludes with a chapter evaluating Kafi's interpretive approach and its contribution to the broader tradition of Marxian literary scholarship. Throughout, we draw on the theoretical and historical resources assembled in the preceding parts of this textbook, as well as on the latest developments in literary theory, political philosophy, and cultural studies as of 2025-2026.

PART ONE: READING DHUMKETU

CHAPTER ONE: THE NEWSPAPER AS LITERARY FORM: DHUMKETU IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1.1 The Problem of Genre: What Kind of Text Is a Political Newspaper?

When Abdul Kafi includes Dhumketu among the primary objects of analysis in his book, alongside a canonical literary play by Tagore, he is making an implicit but significant claim about genre and about the kinds of texts that are appropriate objects for literary and cultural scholarship. The inclusion of a newspaper alongside a theatrical masterpiece challenges the conventional hierarchy of literary forms that places poetry and drama at the apex of aesthetic value and relegates journalism, no matter how brilliant, to the realm of the ephemeral and the merely pragmatic.

This challenge to literary hierarchy is itself philosophically important. The conventional distinction between literature and journalism, between art and propaganda, between the timeless and the historically situated, is not a natural or neutral distinction. It is a cultural construction

with a specific history and a specific ideological function. The elevation of certain forms of writing to the status of "literature" and the demotion of others to the status of "mere journalism" or "mere propaganda" reflects particular judgments about value, permanence, and significance that are themselves shaped by class position, institutional interests, and ideological presuppositions.

The Marxian tradition of literary criticism, from its beginnings, has been suspicious of this hierarchy. Marx himself wrote journalism throughout his life, including some of the most significant political journalism of the nineteenth century, and saw no fundamental distinction between the analytical and argumentative work he did in the columns of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* or the *New York Tribune* and the theoretical work he did in *Capital*. Engels, in his analysis of the novels of Balzac, demonstrated that a Marxian literary criticism attends to the political and historical significance of literary texts in ways that cut across the formal distinction between high literature and popular culture.

Kafi's inclusion of *Dhumketu* follows in this tradition. His argument, implicit in the structure of his book, is that *Dhumketu* is not less significant as an object of literary and cultural analysis than *Raktakarobi* simply because it is a newspaper rather than a play. It is differently significant, and understanding how requires attending to the specific forms and functions of political journalism as a cultural practice rather than simply applying the analytical categories developed for the analysis of canonical literary forms.

1.2 The Historical Moment of Dhumketu's Publication: Bengal in 1922

To understand *Dhumketu* in its full historical significance, it is necessary to reconstruct with some care the specific historical moment of its publication. The year 1922 was an extraordinarily charged moment in the history of Bengal and of the Indian nationalist movement more broadly. The Non-Cooperation Movement launched by Gandhi in 1920 had mobilized millions of Indians in a campaign of civil disobedience against British colonial rule, and its reverberations were felt across Bengal. But 1922 was also the year of the Chauri Chaura incident, in which a crowd of protesters killed police constables at a station in the United Provinces, leading Gandhi to suspend the Non-Cooperation Movement on grounds of non-violence, a decision that generated enormous controversy within the nationalist movement and that left many radical activists, including Nazrul, feeling betrayed and disillusioned.

The economic conditions in Bengal in 1922 were deeply distressed. The aftermath of the First World War had brought economic disruption, inflation, and unemployment on a significant scale. The jute industry, one of the most important in Bengal, was experiencing cyclical fluctuations that created severe hardship for the mill workers of Calcutta and the jute cultivators of rural Bengal. The zamindari system continued to extract surplus from the peasantry in conditions that many analysts, including the writers of *Dhumketu*, described as barely distinguishable from feudal exploitation. And the specific condition of the Muslim peasantry and working class in Bengal, vulnerable both to the economic exploitation of the colonial system and to the social and cultural subordination of a minority community in a society where Hindu *bhadralok* culture dominated the institutions of public life, was a recurring concern in the pages of *Dhumketu*.

This historical context is not merely background to the text. It is constitutive of it. Dhumketu did not analyze colonial Bengal from the outside, as an academic exercise in political critique. It spoke from within the situation of colonial exploitation and nationalist struggle, drawing on the experiences and the language of the communities it addressed, and attempting to transform that language and those experiences into an instrument of political consciousness and mobilization. Understanding this situated character of Dhumketu is the first requirement of any adequate analysis of the text.

1.3 Nazrul's Editorial Voice: The Construction of a Revolutionary Persona

One of the most striking features of Dhumketu as a text, and one of the central concerns of Kafi's analysis, is the way in which Nazrul constructs through the newspaper a specific editorial persona, a revolutionary voice that is simultaneously deeply personal and broadly representative, simultaneously rooted in specific Islamic and Bengali cultural traditions and aspiring to a universalism that transcends those traditions.

The editorial persona of Dhumketu is inseparable from the specific literary forms that Nazrul deploys in its pages. Poetry, prose poetry, direct political commentary, satirical sketches, letters to readers, responses to critics: all of these forms are woven together in a way that refuses the conventional distinctions between literary and journalistic writing, between the aesthetic and the political, between personal expression and public address. This formal hybridity is not accidental. It reflects a specific understanding of the relationship between literary form and political function, an understanding that sees the cultivation of revolutionary consciousness as requiring a kind of writing that can move, persuade, inspire, and analyze all at once.

The construction of this editorial persona requires analysis on several levels. At the level of language, Nazrul's writing in Dhumketu is characterized by a specific deployment of Bengali that draws on both the classical literary tradition and the vernacular spoken language of ordinary people, mixing elevated poetic register with colloquial directness in ways that were both aesthetically striking and politically effective. This linguistic hybridity is itself a political statement, a refusal of the cultural elitism that restricted access to the most valued forms of literary language to those with the educational capital to master them.

At the level of imagery and symbolism, Dhumketu is saturated with a specific set of images that recur across different texts and different registers: the comet as symbol of disruptive, transformative force; fire as symbol of revolutionary destruction that is the precondition for new creation; light as symbol of the knowledge that dispels the darkness of ignorance and oppression; the dawn as symbol of the new day that is coming after the long night of colonial subjugation. These images are not arbitrary. They draw on specific traditions of imagery, both within the Islamic and Quranic tradition and within the Romantic and revolutionary literary tradition of Europe and Bengal, that carry specific meanings and associations for specific audiences. Kafi's analysis of these images in their specific literary and cultural contexts is one of the most detailed and most illuminating aspects of his scholarly work.

1.4 The Sedition Cases and the Question of Political Speech

Dhumketu's relationship to the law of the colonial state is one of the most fascinating and most theoretically significant aspects of its history as a text. The newspaper was prosecuted and eventually suppressed by the British colonial government under the sedition provisions of the Indian Penal Code, and Nazrul was imprisoned as a result. This history of legal suppression raises fundamental questions about the relationship between political speech, literary expression, and state power that are directly relevant to both the legal analysis of speech rights and the philosophical analysis of political communication.

The sedition provisions of the Indian Penal Code, originally enacted by the British colonial government in 1870 in response to the growth of nationalist journalism, criminalize any speech or writing that tends to bring the government into hatred or contempt or attempts to excite disaffection toward the government. The application of these provisions to Dhumketu raised questions that remain relevant in contemporary India, where sedition law has been used extensively by both state and national governments to suppress political dissent and critical journalism.

From a legal and philosophical perspective, the prosecution of Dhumketu raises fundamental questions about the proper scope of free speech protections in a democratic or proto-democratic polity. The liberal tradition, from John Stuart Mill's "On Liberty" onward, has generally defended broad protections for political speech on the grounds that the free exchange of ideas is essential both for the discovery of truth and for the functioning of democratic self-government. The application of sedition law to political journalism was, on this analysis, not merely an abuse of legal power but a fundamental violation of the principles of legitimate political authority.

But the colonial context complicates this liberal analysis in important ways. The British colonial government was not a legitimate democratic government whose authority derived from the consent of the governed. It was an alien imperial power that maintained its rule through a combination of economic exploitation, military force, and legal coercion. In this context, the question of what counts as legitimate political speech cannot be answered simply by applying the liberal framework developed for the analysis of speech rights within a democratic polity. It requires engaging with the specific political theory of anti-colonial resistance, and with the question of what forms of political communication are appropriate and legitimate in conditions of colonial subjugation.

Kafi's analysis of the sedition cases against Dhumketu engages with these questions in ways that connect the specific legal history of Nazrul's prosecution to the broader theoretical debates about political speech, colonial authority, and the right of resistance. His analysis draws on both the Marxian tradition of analyzing law as an instrument of class and colonial domination and on the more recent tradition of critical legal studies that has developed analytical tools for understanding the specific ways in which law operates to privilege certain social actors and marginalize others.

CHAPTER TWO: THE POLITICS OF FIRE: IMAGERY, SYMBOLISM, AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN DHUMKETU

2.1 Fire as Revolutionary Symbol: From Burke to Bloch

The image of fire is one of the most persistent and most powerful in the vocabulary of revolutionary politics across cultures and centuries. From the fire of Prometheus to the flames of the French Revolution to the burning of plantation records in the Haitian revolution to the fiery rhetoric of abolitionist speeches and labor movement manifestos, fire has served as a symbol of the transformative power that destroys the old order as the precondition for the creation of something new. In *Dhumketu*, fire is central to the symbolic vocabulary through which Nazrul articulates his revolutionary vision.

But fire is not a simple or univocal symbol. It carries a range of meanings that can be activated in different ways depending on the specific linguistic and cultural context of its deployment. Fire destroys but also warms and gives light. It is chaotic and uncontrolled but also purifying and clarifying. It is associated in the Islamic tradition with the hellfire that punishes the wicked but also with the divine light that illuminates the faithful. It is associated in the Hindu tradition with Agni, the sacred fire of the Vedic ritual that mediates between the human and the divine, but also with the destructive fire that Shiva carries in his role as cosmic destroyer.

Kafi's analysis of Nazrul's use of fire imagery attends to the specific ways in which these different semantic valences are activated and combined in the specific contexts of *Dhumketu*'s texts. His approach draws on the tradition of symbolic analysis developed in literary criticism and cultural theory, from Gaston Bachelard's phenomenological analysis of elemental imagery in "The Psychoanalysis of Fire" (1938) to Ernst Bloch's analysis of the "principle of hope" in his three-volume work of the same name, which traces the persistence of utopian imagination through the entire history of human culture, from fire myths and fairy tales to revolutionary political manifestos.

Bloch's concept of the "anticipatory consciousness," the capacity of the human imagination to reach beyond the given toward the possible, is particularly relevant to Kafi's analysis of *Dhumketu*'s symbolic vocabulary. For Bloch, the most powerful revolutionary symbols are those that succeed in activating the latent utopian content of existing cultural traditions, drawing out the implicit critique of the present and the implicit vision of a better future that are contained even in the most traditional forms of cultural expression. Nazrul's use of Islamic imagery, of the language of divine justice and divine love, in the service of a revolutionary politics that is simultaneously nationalist, socialist, and humanist, represents precisely this kind of activation of latent utopian content. It is a way of saying: the tradition itself, properly understood, demands the transformation of the existing order.

2.2 Language and Class: Who Could Read Dhumketu?

The question of *Dhumketu*'s readership is not merely a historical question about the newspaper's circulation and distribution. It is a theoretical question about the relationship between the specific linguistic form of a text and the social constituency it addresses. Understanding who could read

Dhumketu, and what reading it meant to different readers in different social positions, is essential for understanding what the newspaper achieved as a political intervention.

The literary Bengali in which much of Dhumketu was written was not uniformly accessible to all Bengali speakers. The colonial educational system had created significant stratifications of literacy and literary competence within the Bengali-speaking population, with full access to the literary language restricted primarily to those who had received formal education. The peasants and workers on whose behalf Dhumketu claimed to speak were, in many cases, semiliterate or illiterate. They could not read the newspaper directly.

But this does not mean that Dhumketu's intervention was limited to the educated middle class. In the specific culture of political activism in 1920s Bengal, newspapers like Dhumketu functioned not only as individually read texts but as collectively consumed social artifacts. They were read aloud in tea shops and market squares, their most powerful passages were memorized and recited, their poems were set to music and sung at political meetings, their arguments were discussed and debated by communities of readers who then transmitted their substance to those who could not read. This collective and performative dimension of political journalism is a crucial part of its social function and its political significance, and it is a dimension that literary analysis must attend to if it is to understand the full complexity of texts like Dhumketu.

Kafi's analysis of Dhumketu as a political text attends carefully to this performative dimension. His approach draws on the tradition of oral history and performance studies that has developed analytical tools for understanding the relationship between written texts and the oral cultures within which they circulate, as well as on the tradition of political communication studies that analyzes the specific rhetorical forms through which political discourse seeks to persuade, mobilize, and transform the consciousness of its audiences.

2.3 Islam, Marxism, and the Synthesis of Nazrul's Political Vision

One of the most intellectually challenging aspects of Dhumketu for the tradition of Marxian literary scholarship is the specific way in which Nazrul combines Islamic religious language and imagery with the language of revolutionary politics. This combination is often described as an inconsistency, as evidence that Nazrul had not fully worked out a coherent theoretical position and was drawing eclectically on incompatible sources. But this description misses something important about the specific intellectual achievement that Nazrul's synthesis represents.

The Islamic tradition of political thought has its own resources for critique of exploitation and defense of the poor that are not merely rhetorical ornaments but substantive philosophical positions. The Quranic emphasis on social justice, on the obligation of the wealthy to share their resources with the poor, on the equality of all human beings before God, on the particular divine concern for the downtrodden and the marginalized, represents a genuine tradition of social ethics that has been deployed throughout Islamic history in the service of political movements against exploitation and inequality. The Sufi tradition, with its emphasis on the immediate relationship between the individual soul and the divine, independently of institutional religious authority, has historically provided resources for both personal liberation and social critique.

Nazrul's deployment of Islamic language and imagery in *Dhumketu* is not merely decorative. It is an argument, an argument that the tradition of Islam itself demands the political transformation that Nazrul is calling for, that the struggle against colonial exploitation and social injustice is not merely a secular political demand but a religious and spiritual imperative. This argument was politically significant because it addressed a Muslim Bengali audience that might be skeptical of purely secular nationalist or socialist politics but that could be reached through the languages of their own religious tradition.

Kafi's analysis of this aspect of *Dhumketu* raises important theoretical questions about the relationship between religion and revolution, between religious tradition and political transformation, that go beyond the specific context of Bengali politics in the 1920s. The question of whether and how religious tradition can serve as a resource for progressive politics, rather than as an instrument of conservative social stabilization, is one of the most important questions in contemporary political philosophy, with direct relevance to debates about political Islam, liberation theology, and the role of faith communities in progressive social movements globally. Kafi's engagement with this question through his analysis of Nazrul provides a historically grounded contribution to these contemporary debates.

2.4 The Aesthetics of Agitation: Form and Function in Political Journalism

Any adequate analysis of *Dhumketu* must address the question of the relationship between aesthetic quality and political function in the specific form of political journalism. This question is at once aesthetic, political, and philosophical, and it is central to the tradition of Marxian literary aesthetics within which Kafi works.

The conventional opposition between aesthetic quality and political utility, between art and propaganda, posits that the most politically effective writing is the most direct, the most accessible, the most willing to subordinate formal complexity to the demands of immediate communication and mobilization. On this view, the kind of writing that appears in *Dhumketu*, which draws on a rich tradition of literary imagery and formal innovation, might seem overly elaborate for purely political purposes. Surely a simple political manifesto would be more effective than an ornate poem?

But this conventional opposition is, in the most sophisticated traditions of political aesthetics, deeply questionable. The most effective political writing, including the most effective political journalism, is effective precisely because of its formal qualities, because of the way it deploys imagery, rhythm, narrative, and argument in combinations that are simultaneously intellectually persuasive and emotionally compelling. A purely logical argument can be countered by another logical argument. A poem that activates the deepest resources of a reader's emotional and cultural life is not so easily neutralized.

Walter Benjamin's concept of the "political tendency" in literary art, developed in his essay "The Author as Producer" (1934), provides a useful framework for analyzing the relationship between aesthetic quality and political function in texts like *Dhumketu*. Benjamin argues that the political tendency of a literary work is not to be found in its surface content, in what it says explicitly about political questions, but in its literary technique, in the specific ways it deploys the formal

resources of literature to transform the reader's relationship to the world. A politically effective literary text is one that not only makes political arguments but transforms the formal conditions of literary production and reception in ways that serve the project of political liberation.

Kafi's analysis of Dhumketu can be read as applying something like Benjamin's framework to the specific case of Nazrul's political journalism, attending to the specific formal techniques through which Dhumketu achieves its political effects and analyzing how those formal techniques interact with the specific political content of the newspaper's arguments. This approach allows him to do justice to both the aesthetic and the political dimensions of the text, refusing the false choice between treating it as either mere propaganda or pure literature.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONALISM, RELIGION, AND THE BOUNDARIES OF COMMUNITY IN DHUMKETU

3.1 The Construction of "The People" in Dhumketu

Every political text that claims to speak in the name of "the people" must construct a specific vision of who those people are, what their interests are, and what obstacles stand between them and the fulfillment of those interests. Dhumketu's construction of "the people" is one of the most politically important and most theoretically interesting aspects of the newspaper, and it is central to Kafi's analysis.

The specific construction of "the people" in Dhumketu is shaped by the intersection of several different political logics. There is the logic of anti-colonial nationalism, which constructs "the people" as the colonized subject of British imperial rule, united by their common subjugation and by their demand for self-determination. There is the logic of class politics, which constructs "the people" primarily as the laboring poor, the peasants and workers whose exploitation forms the material basis of colonial rule. And there is the logic of religious community, which constructs "the people" in terms of the specific experience of Muslim Bengalis as a doubly marginalized community, subject both to colonial exploitation and to the cultural dominance of the Hindu bhadralok.

These three logics of political community do not always point in the same direction. The nationalist logic tends toward a construction of "the people" that encompasses all colonized subjects regardless of class or religious identity. The class logic tends toward a construction that prioritizes the material interests of the laboring poor over the cultural and religious identifications of specific communities. The religious-community logic tends toward a construction that emphasizes the specific experience and interests of Muslim Bengalis in ways that can conflict with both the nationalist and the class-based constructions.

Dhumketu's political intervention consists, in part, in its specific attempt to hold these different logics together, to construct a vision of "the people" that is simultaneously nationalist, class-conscious, and sensitive to the specific experiences of religious minorities. This attempt is not always fully successful, and the tensions between its different elements are visible in the specific

texts of the newspaper. But the attempt itself is politically and intellectually significant, and Kafi's analysis of the specific ways in which Dhumketu navigates between these different political logics is one of the most illuminating aspects of his scholarship.

The theoretical framework of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, developed in "Hegemony and Socialist Strategy" (1985), provides useful analytical tools for understanding the logic of political construction that Dhumketu exemplifies. Laclau and Mouffe's concept of "hegemony" describes the process through which diverse political demands are articulated together into a coherent political project that can claim to represent "the people" as a whole. This process of articulation is never simply given but must be actively constructed through political work, including the specific kinds of political-cultural work that a newspaper like Dhumketu performs.

3.2 The Hindu-Muslim Question and the Limits of Universalism

The specific challenge of constructing a universalist political vision in a society deeply divided along communal lines is one that runs through all of Dhumketu's texts and that receives particularly intense treatment in some of its most celebrated passages. Nazrul's famous poem "Hindu-Musalman," published in Dhumketu, is perhaps the most direct and most passionate statement of his universalist vision: the insistence that the division between Hindu and Muslim is an artificial construction serving the interests of colonial rule and of the social elites in both communities, and that genuine human solidarity requires the transcendence of communal boundaries.

But the poem is also, read carefully, a more complex and more ambivalent text than its surface universalism suggests. It acknowledges the reality of communal division and the intensity of communal feeling in ways that cannot simply be dissolved by an act of intellectual will. The universalism it advocates is not the denial of difference but its transformation: the vision of a community in which the specific traditions and identities of Hindus and Muslims are preserved and celebrated within a framework of larger solidarity, rather than being set in opposition to each other as competing and mutually exclusive claims.

This vision has been criticized from multiple directions. From within the Hindu nationalist tradition, it has been criticized as a denial of the specific and superior claims of Hindu civilization. From within a certain strand of Muslim political thought, it has been criticized as a capitulation to Hindu cultural dominance and a failure to take seriously the specific political interests of the Muslim community. From within the Marxian tradition, it has been criticized as an idealist solution to what is fundamentally a material problem, as a form of consciousness that can be achieved only in conditions of genuine material equality that do not yet exist.

Kafi's engagement with these critiques in his analysis of Dhumketu is careful and nuanced. He does not simply defend Nazrul's universalism against all criticism, nor does he simply dismiss it as naive idealism. Instead, he reads the specific texts of Dhumketu in their historical context, attending to the specific political conditions and political constraints within which Nazrul was working, and evaluating his universalist vision in terms of both its political effectiveness in those conditions and its theoretical coherence as a philosophical position.

3.3 Women, Gender, and the Silences of Dhumketu

Any comprehensive analysis of Dhumketu must also attend to what the newspaper does not say, to the silences and absences that structure its political vision as much as its explicit content. One of the most significant silences in Dhumketu, from the perspective of contemporary feminist literary scholarship, is the relative absence of sustained analysis of the specific situation of women in colonial Bengal.

This silence is not complete. Dhumketu does address questions of women's education, of the practice of purdah, and of the social constraints imposed on women by both colonial and traditional patriarchal structures. But these addresses are typically framed within the broader nationalist project of national regeneration, in which the liberation of women is understood primarily as a condition for the strength and progress of the national community rather than as a demand arising from the specific interests and experiences of women themselves.

This limitation reflects specific ideological constraints of the early twentieth century that shaped even the most progressive political thinking of the period. The nationalist and progressive movements of the 1920s, for all their genuine radicalism on questions of colonial exploitation and class struggle, were typically unable to extend their radicalism fully to questions of gender. The demand for women's liberation was either absorbed into the nationalist project, as a dimension of the broader project of national regeneration, or deferred to the postcolonial future, when the primary battle against colonial rule had been won.

Kafi's engagement with the gender question in his analysis of Dhumketu reflects the influence of feminist scholarship on the tradition of Marxian literary criticism in Bengal. While his primary analytical framework remains Marxian rather than feminist, his analysis acknowledges the specific limitations of the progressive tradition's engagement with questions of gender and uses this acknowledgment as the basis for a more nuanced and more comprehensive assessment of the tradition's historical significance and its continuing relevance.

3.4 The Afterlives of Dhumketu: Memory, Myth, and Political Legacy

Dhumketu did not simply exist in 1922-1923 and then disappear into the archive. It has had a rich and complex set of afterlives, in which its texts have been remembered, reinterpreted, appropriated, and transformed in ways that reflect the changing political and cultural contexts of successive historical periods. Understanding these afterlives is essential for understanding the full significance of Kafi's scholarly engagement with Dhumketu, because his analysis is not only an exercise in historical recovery but an intervention in the ongoing processes through which the memory of Dhumketu is constructed and contested.

The mythology of Dhumketu as a symbol of revolutionary resistance has been central to the self-understanding of the Bengali left throughout the twentieth century. The image of Nazrul as the "rebel poet," the fire-bearing comet who declared war on all forms of oppression, has been an enormously powerful cultural resource for successive generations of left political activists in Bengal. This mythologization has served genuinely important political purposes, providing a

model of committed intellectual practice and a source of cultural inspiration for movements of resistance.

But mythologization also distorts. The Nazrul who emerges from the mythological tradition is sometimes simpler, more consistent, and less intellectually complex than the Nazrul who emerges from careful textual analysis of the actual newspapers and poems. The specific tensions and ambivalences of Dhumketu's political vision, the complex navigation between nationalism and class politics, between Islamic tradition and secular universalism, between revolutionary aspiration and the constraints of historical possibility, tend to be smoothed over in the mythological version. Kafi's scholarship, by returning to the actual texts, performs the important critical function of recovering the complexity that mythologization tends to flatten.

CHAPTER FOUR: KAFI'S METHODOLOGY: WHAT THE ANALYSIS OF DHUMKETU REVEALS ABOUT HIS SCHOLARLY PRACTICE

4.1 The Method of Immanent Critique

Kafi's analysis of Dhumketu exemplifies a specific method of literary and cultural analysis that can be described as immanent critique in the tradition of the Frankfurt School. Immanent critique, as Adorno and Horkheimer developed the concept, consists in analyzing a text, a cultural form, or a social institution according to its own stated principles and values, showing where it succeeds in living up to those principles and where it falls short. This method differs from external critique, which judges a text by standards external to it, by the standards of a different ideology or a different set of values. Immanent critique takes the text at its word, and then shows what that word commits the text to achieving and what prevents it from fully achieving it.

In the case of Dhumketu, immanent critique means reading the newspaper against its own explicit commitments to universalism, to the liberation of all the exploited and oppressed regardless of religious community or class position, to the synthesis of Islamic tradition and revolutionary politics, and evaluating how fully the specific texts of the newspaper actually fulfill these commitments. Where Kafi finds genuine achievements, he celebrates them. Where he finds limitations or contradictions, he analyzes them as products of the specific historical conditions that constrained even the most radical thinking of the period, rather than as simple failures of will or intelligence.

This method of immanent critique is not merely a scholarly technique. It is a form of intellectual respect for the tradition being analyzed. It takes seriously the claims that the tradition makes for itself, treats them as genuine intellectual and political commitments rather than as mere rhetoric, and evaluates them according to the most rigorous standards that can be derived from the tradition's own principles. This is a demanding form of respect, because it does not allow for the easy consolation of simply celebrating the tradition's achievements while ignoring its limitations. But it is ultimately more respectful than either hagiography or dismissal.

4.2 Historical Materialism as Interpretive Framework

The specific theoretical framework within which Kafi conducts his immanent critique is historical materialism, the Marxian method of analyzing cultural and intellectual phenomena in terms of their relationship to the specific material conditions of their production and reception. This framework does not reduce literary texts to mere reflections of economic structure, as the cruder versions of Marxian literary criticism have sometimes done. It analyzes them as specific interventions in the social and cultural dynamics of their historical moment, shaped by those dynamics but also actively participating in shaping them.

Applied to Dhumketu, historical materialism means situating the newspaper's texts within the specific social and economic conditions of Bengal in 1922: the colonial economy, the class structure of Bengali society, the specific position of Muslim Bengalis within that structure, the political dynamics of the nationalist movement and its internal divisions. It also means attending to the specific material conditions of Dhumketu's production and distribution: who printed it, how it was financed, who distributed it, how it reached its readers, and what institutional and political constraints shaped its content and form.

This attention to material conditions is not the whole of Kafi's analytical framework. He combines the materialist analysis of conditions with a detailed textual analysis of specific passages, images, and arguments that attends to the formal and aesthetic dimensions of the writing as well as its ideological content. But the material analysis provides the anchor that prevents the textual analysis from becoming purely formalist, from losing sight of the specific historical world that the texts both reflect and engage with.

4.3 The Question of Influence: Dhumketu in the Bengali Literary Tradition

Part of what makes Kafi's analysis of Dhumketu significant for the broader tradition of Bengali Marxian literary scholarship is his attention to the question of influence, to the specific ways in which Dhumketu shaped and continues to shape the Bengali literary and political imagination. Tracing lines of influence requires both historical knowledge and literary sensitivity, and Kafi's analysis demonstrates both qualities.

The direct influence of Dhumketu on subsequent Bengali radical literature is substantial and can be traced in specific formal and thematic features of texts across the rest of the twentieth century. The tradition of politically committed Bengali poetry that runs from Dhumketu through the progressive writers movement to the poetry of resistance during the Emergency period of 1975-1977 and beyond draws consistently on the specific imagery, the specific formal techniques, and the specific vision of the relationship between poetic language and political struggle that Nazrul developed in Dhumketu.

But influence is not merely a matter of direct stylistic or thematic borrowing. It operates at deeper levels, shaping the assumptions and expectations with which readers and writers approach questions of literary politics, the range of possibilities that seem available for the intersection of literary form and political content, and the specific values and commitments that the tradition of politically engaged Bengali writing understands itself to embody. At these deeper levels,

Dhumketu's influence on Bengali literary culture is pervasive and continuing, and Kafi's analysis of this influence is one of the most valuable contributions of his scholarship to the tradition it analyzes.

4.4 Strengths and Limitations of Kafi's Reading of Dhumketu

Any serious engagement with Kafi's scholarship must include a critical evaluation of both its achievements and its limitations. This is not a merely perfunctory exercise in balanced assessment. It is a necessary dimension of the intellectual respect that serious scholarship demands, both for the scholar being analyzed and for the tradition within which the analysis takes place.

The principal strengths of Kafi's reading of Dhumketu are several. His historical knowledge is deep and extensive, allowing him to situate the newspaper's texts within their specific context with a precision and a richness of detail that illuminates aspects of the texts that would be invisible to a less historically informed reader. His theoretical framework, while primarily Marxian, is sophisticated enough to avoid the mechanical applications of class analysis that have often limited the political effectiveness of Marxian literary criticism. His attention to specific passages and specific formal choices demonstrates a genuine close-reading skill that distinguishes his work from more programmatic forms of ideological criticism.

The principal limitations are also identifiable. The most significant is perhaps the relative underdevelopment of his engagement with feminist theory and with the specific situation of women in the texts he analyzes. As noted earlier, Dhumketu's treatment of gender is limited and problematic, and a fully adequate analysis of the newspaper would need to engage more directly with these limitations. A second limitation is the relative absence of comparative analysis situating Dhumketu within the global context of radical political journalism in the 1920s, including the specifically anti-colonial journalism of movements in other parts of the colonized world that were grappling with analogous questions. A third limitation, which is partly a consequence of the specific conditions of Bengali academic publishing, is the limited engagement with the most recent theoretical developments in postcolonial studies, affect theory, and digital humanities that might offer new tools for the analysis of a text like Dhumketu.

These limitations do not negate the genuine achievements of Kafi's analysis. They point, rather, toward the directions in which the tradition of Bengali Marxian literary scholarship can productively develop in future scholarly work.

PART TWO: READING RAKTAKAROBI

CHAPTER FIVE: THE WORLD OF YAKSHAPURI: SPACE, POWER, AND DESIRE IN RAKTAKAROBI

5.1 The Dramatic Space as Political Allegory

Raktakarobi is a play organized around the systematic opposition between two spatial realms: the city of Yakshapuri, with its gold mines, its numbered workers, its bureaucratic apparatus of control, and its king who both embodies and mystifies the system of exploitation; and the world beyond the city's walls, represented primarily through the flowers and the natural landscape that Nandini brings with her and that she insistently speaks of. This spatial opposition is not merely a scenic device. It is the fundamental structural principle of the play's political allegory, the spatial form through which Tagore articulates his understanding of the relationship between capitalism and human liberation.

The city of Yakshapuri is constructed in the play as a space of total administration, a space in which every dimension of human life has been subordinated to the single demand of production. The workers have no names, only numbers. Their time is measured and parceled out in units of productive labor. Their bodies are instrumentalized, treated not as the embodiment of human subjectivity but as mere means to the end of gold extraction. Their relationships with each other are distorted by the competitive pressures of the production system and by the ideological mystifications through which the system represents itself as natural, inevitable, and even beneficial.

This depiction anticipates with remarkable prescience a range of subsequent theoretical analyses of capitalism's impact on human life. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's analysis of the "totally administered society" in "Dialectic of Enlightenment" (1944), Herbert Marcuse's analysis of "one-dimensional man" in his 1964 book of that title, Michel Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power and the management of populations in "Discipline and Punish" (1975): all of these theoretical frameworks illuminate aspects of what Tagore is representing in Yakshapuri, and conversely, Yakshapuri provides a remarkably vivid literary illustration of what these theoretical frameworks are analyzing in the abstract.

Kafi's analysis of Yakshapuri as a spatial allegory of capitalist modernity draws on both the Marxian tradition of analyzing capitalism as a system of social relations and on the more recent tradition of spatial analysis in cultural theory, associated particularly with Henri Lefebvre's "The Production of Space" (1974) and its influence on subsequent cultural geography and urban theory. Lefebvre's argument that space is not a neutral container for social life but a product of social relations, shaped by the specific interests and power dynamics of the social formation within which it is produced, provides a theoretical framework that allows Kafi to analyze Yakshapuri not merely as a fictional setting but as a specific form of spatial organization that embodies and reproduces specific relations of power and exploitation.

5.2 The King: Authority, Desire, and the Dialectics of Power

The figure of the King in Raktakarobi is one of the most complex and most theoretically interesting characters in Tagore's dramatic work. He is simultaneously the embodiment of the system of exploitation that governs Yakshapuri and a figure of profound ambivalence, fascinated by Nandini and by what she represents, capable of moments of genuine insight into the

destructiveness of his own power, but ultimately unable or unwilling to break with the system that defines his authority and his identity.

This ambivalence is not a dramatic inconsistency but a philosophically significant representation of the specific psychology of those who benefit from systems of exploitation while being, in some dimension of their consciousness, aware of the human costs of that exploitation. It is, in other words, a representation of a specific form of ideological consciousness, a consciousness that is not simply ignorant of the truth but that manages its knowledge of the truth in ways that allow it to continue acting in accordance with the system's demands while maintaining a subjective sense of its own humanity and its own good intentions.

Kafi's analysis of the King draws on the Marxian tradition of ideology critique, particularly on Antonio Gramsci's analysis of hegemony as a form of power that operates through consent rather than simply through coercion, and on the Althusserian analysis of ideology as a structure that constitutes subjects in specific relations to the social formation. The King's ambivalence, in Kafi's reading, is not merely a personal psychological trait but a representation of the specific way in which the ruling class experiences its own power: as both a given of the social world and as something that requires constant management and mystification to maintain.

But Kafi's analysis goes beyond the purely ideological to engage with the specific formal and aesthetic dimensions of Tagore's representation. The King appears in the play primarily as a voice behind a net or screen, not directly visible to the other characters or to the audience. This staging device is not merely a theatrical technique. It is a philosophical statement about the nature of power: that power in the modern system operates precisely through this kind of absent presence, through the invisible hand of the market, the faceless bureaucracy, the anonymous forces of capital accumulation that shape the lives of workers without ever directly confronting them as person-to-person domination.

5.3 Nandini and the Red Oleanders: Vitality, Resistance, and the Limits of Aesthetic Redemption

Nandini is the central figure in *Raktakarobi* and the one who has generated the most diverse and contested interpretations in the critical literature on Tagore's play. She is at once the embodiment of natural vitality and creative freedom against the dehumanizing demands of the system, the object of multiple male desires that project onto her their various fantasies of liberation, and the catalyst for whatever possibilities of transformation the play's dramatic action opens up.

The red oleanders that give the play its title are Nandini's characteristic symbol. In the botanical world, the red oleander is a plant of striking beauty that is also highly toxic. This double quality, beauty and danger, attractiveness and destructive power, is central to the symbolic function of the flower in Tagore's allegory. Nandini brings the red oleanders into the city of Yakshapuri, and their presence there is both a source of beauty that the workers respond to with something like renewed life and a challenge to the order of the city that the system cannot ultimately contain or co-opt.

Kafi's analysis of Nandini and the oleanders raises one of the most important and most debated questions in the aesthetics of political literature: the question of aesthetic redemption. Can aesthetic experience, the experience of beauty, of natural vitality, of creative expression, serve as a form of resistance to the dehumanizing demands of capitalist modernity? Or does the offer of aesthetic consolation ultimately serve the interests of the system by providing an emotional safety valve that prevents the transformation of discontent into organized political resistance?

This question connects to the tradition of debates about the political function of art that runs from Schiller's analysis of the aesthetic as a domain of free play that provides a model for genuine human freedom, through the Romantic tradition's investment in imagination and creativity as principles of resistance to industrial modernity, to the Frankfurt School's ambivalent analysis of the culture industry and its capacity to absorb and neutralize genuine cultural dissent. Kafi's engagement with this tradition through his analysis of *Raktakarobi* demonstrates the breadth of his theoretical resources and the sophistication of his approach to the relationship between aesthetic value and political significance.

5.4 Class, Labor, and the Body in Raktakarobi

The workers of Yakshapuri are, as Kafi's analysis emphasizes, at the center of the play's political significance. Their numbered existence, their loss of identity, their deformed bodies and diminished consciousness, represent Tagore's most vivid representation of the human costs of industrial capitalism. And the relationship between the workers and Nandini, their response to her vitality and their eventual participation in the resistance that her presence catalyzes, is the play's primary dramatic and political development.

The analytical question that Kafi's reading of this dimension of the play raises is one of the central questions in the Marxian aesthetics of labor: the question of how literary representation can give adequate expression to the experience of the laboring body. The body of the worker in capitalist production is not merely a philosophical abstraction. It is a specific set of physical experiences: the fatigue of repetitive physical labor, the deformation of the body by specific patterns of industrial work, the sensory numbing produced by constant exposure to noise, heat, and physical danger, the specifically embodied forms of dignity and solidarity that develop among workers in conditions of shared labor.

Tagore's representation of the workers in *Raktakarobi* is not primarily a realistic representation of the actual physical experience of industrial labor in early-twentieth-century India. It is an allegorical representation that works at a higher level of generality, depicting the essential structure of industrial dehumanization rather than its specific empirical forms. This level of generality is both a strength and a limitation of the play as a political text. It allows Tagore to make claims about the universal logic of capitalism's impact on human beings that transcend any particular instance. But it also risks abstracting from the specific, embodied experiences of real workers in ways that reduce their condition to a philosophical problem rather than a human reality.

Kafi's analysis navigates this tension by reading *Raktakarobi* in dialogue with the tradition of realistic Bengali fiction about labor and poverty, including the novels of Manik Bandyopadhyay

and the documentary literature of the Bengal Famine, which provide the specific, embodied detail that Tagore's allegory necessarily abstracts from. This dialogical reading allows him to show how the allegory and the realism are complementary rather than competing modes of political representation, each illuminating aspects of capitalist dehumanization that the other cannot fully capture.

CHAPTER SIX: DESIRE, FREEDOM, AND THE POLITICS OF EMBODIMENT IN RAKTAKAROBI

6.1 Eros and Politics: The Philosophical Stakes of Nandini's Desire

One of the most distinctive and most philosophically significant aspects of Raktakarobi is the centrality of erotic desire to its political allegory. Nandini is not only a symbol of natural vitality and creative freedom in the abstract. She is a specifically sexual figure, and the various relationships she has with the men of Yakshapuri, including the King's fascination, Ranjan's romantic attachment, and Bishu's obsessive love, are central to the play's political and philosophical drama.

The specific philosophical stakes of this erotic politics become clear when Raktakarobi is read in the context of the broader tradition of philosophical reflection on the relationship between erotic desire and political freedom. From Plato's Symposium through the Romantic tradition's investment in love as a model for genuine human connection, to Herbert Marcuse's argument in "Eros and Civilization" (1955) that the liberation of erotic energy from the repressive demands of capitalist productivity is a condition for genuine human emancipation, the question of the relationship between sexual freedom and political freedom has been one of the most contested in political philosophy.

Tagore's engagement with this question in Raktakarobi is nuanced and philosophically sophisticated. He does not simply identify erotic desire with political liberation, as if the mere experience of erotic freedom were sufficient for the transformation of the social order. He recognizes that desire can be distorted and instrumentalized by the very system it seeks to escape, that the King's fascination with Nandini is not a genuine movement toward liberation but a form of possessive desire that ultimately reinforces rather than challenges the logic of the system. At the same time, he insists that there is in genuine erotic connection, in the mutual recognition of two embodied subjects rather than the reduction of one to an object of the other's desire, a model for the kind of human relationship that the system of Yakshapuri has destroyed and that genuine liberation would restore.

6.2 The Psychology of Oppression: What Does Exploitation Do to Human Consciousness?

One of the central questions that Raktakarobi raises and that Kafi's analysis addresses is the psychological question of what systematic exploitation does to the consciousness of those who are subjected to it. This is not merely a question about the emotional states of oppressed people,

though it includes that dimension. It is a question about the fundamental structure of subjectivity under conditions of systematic dehumanization.

The numbered workers of Yakshapuri are not simply unhappy. Their unhappiness has a specific structure: a confusion of values, a loss of the capacity to envision alternatives to their situation, a dependency on the system that oppresses them because it is the only system they know, a tendency to identify with the interests of the system against their own better judgment. This is what the tradition of critical theory has analyzed under various headings: false consciousness, ideological mystification, the internalization of oppression, the Stockholm syndrome of the systematically exploited.

The psychoanalytic tradition, from Freud through Reich and Fromm to Fanon, has provided important analytical tools for understanding the psychological mechanisms through which oppression reproduces itself in the consciousness of the oppressed. Fanon's analysis in "Black Skin, White Masks" (1952) of the specific psychological effects of colonial racism on the consciousness of the colonized subject is particularly relevant here. Fanon argues that colonial domination produces a specific form of psychological damage in which the colonized subject internalizes the racist values of the colonizer, measuring their own worth by the standards of the culture that has defined them as inferior, and thereby becoming complicit in their own degradation.

Kafi's reading of Raktakarobi draws on this psychoanalytic-political tradition to analyze the specific ways in which the play represents the psychological dimensions of economic exploitation. His analysis shows how Tagore's dramatic representation of the workers' consciousness anticipates many of the insights that the tradition of critical psychology would develop more systematically in subsequent decades, and how the play's political allegory achieves its most profound effects precisely through its engagement with the psychological, not merely the economic and political, dimensions of the system it critiques.

6.3 Tagore and the Western Avant-Garde: Expressionism, Symbolism, and Bengali Modernism

Raktakarobi was written in 1923-1924, at a moment when the European literary and artistic avant-garde was producing some of its most significant and most politically charged work. German Expressionism was at its height, producing theater, visual art, and film that used formal distortion and intensity of expression to convey the psychological experience of a society traumatized by war and industrialization. French Surrealism was in its formative period, developing techniques of psychic automatism and dream imagery that sought to bypass the rational censorship of everyday consciousness and access the deeper layers of unconscious experience. The Soviet avant-garde, including Meyerhold in theater and Eisenstein in film, was developing new formal techniques in the service of the revolutionary project of transforming both art and society.

The question of Tagore's relationship to these Western avant-garde movements is complex and not fully resolved in the critical literature. There is clear evidence that Tagore was aware of and influenced by various European artistic developments through his extensive international travels

and his wide reading. But his engagement with these movements was always selective and critical, drawing on specific techniques and ideas while adapting them to the specific demands of the Bengali cultural context and his own philosophical vision.

In Raktakarobi specifically, there are formal features that resemble elements of Expressionist theater: the use of allegorical characters rather than realistically depicted individuals, the spatial organization of the dramatic world to represent psychological and social structures rather than realistic environments, the intensity and heightening of emotion and imagery that characterizes Expressionist style. But these formal similarities do not reduce Raktakarobi to a Bengali version of European Expressionism. The specific philosophical and cultural content of the play, the specific tradition of Bengali literary and musical culture it draws on, the specific political concerns of the colonial situation it addresses, all give it a distinctive character that cannot be understood simply as a regional adaptation of a European model.

6.4 The Problem of Tragic Form and Political Possibility

Raktakarobi raises the question of tragedy and its relationship to political possibility in ways that are both dramatically compelling and philosophically significant. The play has a tragic structure in the classical sense: it ends with death, with the sacrifice of Ranjan and with Nandini's grief, rather than with the triumphant liberation that a purely optimistic political allegory would require. This tragic ending is not simply a concession to dramatic necessity. It is a philosophical statement about the relationship between the aspirations of the human spirit and the resistances of the actual historical world.

The question of whether tragedy is a politically appropriate form for literature that aspires to contribute to the transformation of the social order is one of the most contested in Marxian aesthetics. Georg Lukacs's famous argument against the tragic form, which he saw as fundamentally quietist and backward-looking, enshrining the suffering of the individual hero as inevitable and therefore teaching resignation rather than resistance, was directed precisely against the kind of tragic modernism that Raktakarobi might seem to exemplify. Ernst Bloch's counterargument, that the tragic form preserves the memory of genuine human aspiration even in the face of historical defeat, and that this memory is itself a form of utopian anticipation, offers a more generous reading of the political possibilities of tragedy.

Kafi's engagement with this debate through his analysis of Raktakarobi is one of the most philosophically sophisticated aspects of his scholarly work. He reads the play's tragic structure neither as an expression of Tagore's political pessimism nor as a simple endorsement of the Blochian argument that tragic suffering anticipates redemption. Instead, he analyzes the specific dramatic and philosophical work that the tragic ending performs within the play's overall structure, showing how it complicates but does not negate the play's vision of the possibilities of human liberation.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE HISTORICAL TAGORE: RAKTAKAROBI IN ITS POLITICAL CONTEXT

7.1 1924 and the Crisis of Indian Nationalism

To understand *Raktakarobi* fully, it is necessary to understand the specific historical moment of its completion and publication in 1924. The early 1920s were a period of profound crisis and transformation in the Indian nationalist movement, and the specific political developments of this period left clear traces in the fabric of the play.

The years 1921 to 1924 saw the rise and fall of Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement, the growing tensions between the Congress party and the Muslim League over the question of communal representation, the emergence of various forms of revolutionary politics including the Hindustan Republican Association and the revolutionary wing of the Congress, and the increasing stratification of the nationalist movement along class lines as the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie and the landowning classes came increasingly into tension with the demands of peasants and workers.

Tagore's response to these developments was characteristically complex. He was neither a simple supporter of the Congress nationalism represented by Gandhi nor a simple opponent. He agreed with the demand for self-determination and opposed colonialism in all its forms. But he was deeply skeptical of certain aspects of the nationalist politics of the period, including what he saw as the anti-modern romanticism of Gandhi's program of hand-spinning and village self-sufficiency and the communal politics that were increasingly shaping both Hindu and Muslim political organizations.

Raktakarobi's allegory of *Yakshapuri* addresses these political concerns at a level of abstraction that is simultaneously more general and more philosophically fundamental than specific political commentary. The play is not primarily about British colonialism, though the colonial system is certainly among its targets. It is about the logic of a system of domination that reduces human beings to instruments of production, and about the forces of creative resistance that that system cannot fully contain. This level of generality gives the play both its enduring philosophical relevance and the limitations that critics of its political specificity have identified.

7.2 Tagore's Critique of Gandhi: A Philosophical Disagreement

The intellectual debate between Tagore and Gandhi was one of the most significant in the history of modern Indian political thought, and it bears directly on the philosophical concerns of *Raktakarobi*. Tagore's critique of Gandhi's program of national regeneration through the revival of hand-spinning and the *charkha* (spinning wheel) was not merely a disagreement about economic policy. It was a disagreement about the nature of human creativity, about the relationship between tradition and modernity, and about the proper role of imagination and cultural innovation in the project of national liberation.

Gandhi's argument for hand-spinning was that it provided a model of economic self-sufficiency that could liberate Indian villages from their dependency on British manufactured goods, that it connected the educated urban nationalist to the conditions and experiences of the rural poor, and that it embodied in material form the value of self-reliance and discipline that Gandhi saw as the foundation of both personal virtue and political resistance.

Tagore's counter-argument was that Gandhi's program was ultimately based on a nostalgic romanticism about the pre-industrial village that ignored both the genuine poverty and oppression of rural life and the genuine creative and liberating possibilities of science and technology. To celebrate hand-spinning as a model for national regeneration was, in Tagore's view, to counsel a retreat from the challenges of modernity rather than an engagement with them, to confuse the particular instruments of colonial exploitation with the general project of human creative development that science and technology, properly directed by humanist values, could serve.

Raktakarobi is, among other things, Tagore's philosophical response to Gandhi on these questions. The play's depiction of Yakshapuri addresses the destructive potential of industrial technology under capitalist control. But Nandini's response to Yakshapuri is not a rejection of modernity in favor of a return to the pre-industrial village. It is a demand for a different relationship to the forces of production, one in which human creativity and vitality are not suppressed in the service of capital accumulation but liberated and developed in the service of human flourishing. This is a vision of what we might call a humanist modernity, a modernity that retains the genuine achievements of technological development while transforming the social relations within which those achievements are embedded.

7.3 Reception History: How Raktakarobi Has Been Read

The reception history of Raktakarobi is extraordinarily rich and complex, reflecting the multiple dimensions of the play's significance and the changing historical contexts in which it has been read. From its initial reception in the 1920s, through the progressive era of the 1930s and 1940s, through the postcolonial period of the 1950s and 1960s, to the contemporary moment of the early twenty-first century, the play has been read and reread in ways that illuminate both its own inexhaustible complexity and the changing concerns of the intellectual and political contexts that have engaged with it.

The earliest critical responses to Raktakarobi were largely concerned with its formal innovations and with its position within the trajectory of Tagore's own artistic development. Critics who had followed Tagore's work closely recognized in the play a new level of formal experimentation and political engagement that represented both a continuation and a deepening of the concerns that had run through his earlier dramatic work. But there was also considerable critical resistance to the play's allegory, which some critics found obscure and others found too explicit, too didactic, insufficiently subtle in its political symbolism.

The progressive movement of the 1930s and 1940s read Raktakarobi primarily as a text of anti-capitalist critique, emphasizing the allegorical significance of Yakshapuri as a representation of the industrial capitalist system and Nandini's resistance as a model for the kind of human vitality that the progressive movement sought to mobilize in the service of political transformation. This reading was politically powerful but tended to flatten some of the philosophical and aesthetic complexities of the play in the interest of its political message.

The postcolonial period produced more contextual and more historically specific readings that attended to the specific relationship between the play's allegory and the colonial situation of

India in the 1920s. These readings emphasized the connection between Yakshapuri's system of domination and the specific forms of colonial exploitation, including the economic exploitation of Indian labor in the colonial factory system and the cultural and psychological dimensions of colonial dehumanization.

Contemporary readings, including Kafi's, draw on the full range of theoretical resources available in twenty-first-century literary studies to engage with the play's multiple dimensions simultaneously: its political allegory, its philosophical concerns, its formal innovations, its specific historical context, and its continuing relevance to the present moment of global capitalism and its discontents.

7.4 Kafi's Interpretive Contribution: What His Reading Adds

Against this rich background of critical reception, what specific contribution does Kafi's reading make to the understanding of *Raktakarobi*? Several contributions can be identified that distinguish his analysis from its predecessors and that represent genuine advances in the critical understanding of the play.

First, Kafi's analysis situates *Raktakarobi* within a specific constellation of texts, reading it alongside *Dhumketu* and *Langol*, that illuminates aspects of the play's political and philosophical significance that isolated readings miss. Reading Tagore's allegory against Nazrul's agitational journalism and the labor politics of *Langol* allows Kafi to show how the three texts, despite their formal differences and their different authors' different political commitments, are engaged with a common set of problems about the relationship between capitalism, colonial exploitation, cultural resistance, and human liberation in the specific historical moment of early 1920s Bengal.

Second, Kafi's analysis draws on theoretical frameworks, including the Althusserian analysis of ideological state apparatuses and the Lacanian analysis of desire and subjectivity, that were not available to earlier generations of critics and that allow him to engage with dimensions of the play's psychological and philosophical complexity that earlier analyses tended to simplify or avoid.

Third, Kafi's analysis reflects the specific standpoint of a Muslim Bengali Marxian scholar working in the early twenty-first century, a standpoint that allows him to see dimensions of the play's engagement with questions of community, identity, and universalism that may have been less visible to critics working from within different social positions and historical moments. This is not to suggest that Kafi's reading is simply more subjective or more politically determined than other readings. It is to recognize that every reading is made from a specific standpoint and that some standpoints are more illuminating than others for specific texts and specific questions.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF RAKTAKAROBI: WHAT TAGORE BELIEVED ABOUT HUMAN NATURE

8.1 Tagore's Vedantic Foundations and Their Political Implications

The philosophical anthropology implicit in Raktakarobi, Tagore's understanding of what human beings fundamentally are and what they fundamentally need, draws on a synthesis of Vedantic philosophy, Western humanism, and the specific tradition of Bengali devotional religion that shaped his intellectual and spiritual formation. Understanding this philosophical anthropology is essential for understanding both the power and the limitations of the play's political vision.

The Vedantic tradition, particularly in the form developed by Vivekananda and the neo-Vedantic movement of the late nineteenth century, emphasizes the essential unity of the individual self (atman) with the universal divine consciousness (Brahman). On this view, the fundamental human need is for the recognition of this unity, for the dissolution of the illusion of individual separateness into the awareness of participation in a larger whole. The suffering of the workers in Yakshapuri, on this philosophical analysis, is ultimately the suffering of beings who have been cut off from the recognition of their own divine nature, who have been reduced to their economic function and thereby denied the spiritual dimension of their existence.

This Vedantic anthropology provides Tagore's allegory with a specific philosophical content that distinguishes it from both liberal humanist and Marxian analyses of capitalism's impact on human beings. Where the liberal humanist analysis emphasizes the violation of individual rights and the frustration of individual autonomy, and the Marxian analysis emphasizes the alienation of labor and the distortion of human consciousness by class exploitation, Tagore's Vedantic analysis emphasizes the spiritual impoverishment of beings who have been denied access to the larger unity that constitutes their deepest nature.

The political implications of this philosophical anthropology are complex and somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, the Vedantic insistence on the fundamental unity of all consciousness tends toward a universalism that refuses all forms of social division and hierarchy as violations of the fundamental truth of human nature. This universalism is politically progressive in its opposition to all forms of oppression based on class, caste, religion, or national identity. On the other hand, the Vedantic emphasis on spiritual realization as the ultimate human need tends toward a political quietism that sees the transformation of social conditions as secondary to the transformation of individual consciousness, and this tendency can in practice serve as a justification for accepting existing social arrangements rather than challenging them.

Kafi's analysis of this dimension of Tagore's thought navigates carefully between recognizing the genuine philosophical richness of the Vedantic tradition and identifying the specific political limitations of its application to the analysis of colonial capitalism. His engagement with this question reflects the more general problem in Marxian literary criticism of how to analyze texts produced within philosophical traditions that are not Marxian without either simply dismissing those traditions as ideological mystification or uncritically adopting their frameworks as if they were politically neutral.

8.2 Tagore and Freud: The Unconscious, the Drives, and the Social

The relationship between Tagore's psychological vision in *Raktakarobi* and the Freudian tradition of psychoanalysis is an interesting and underexplored dimension of the play's intellectual significance. Freud's major works, including "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1900) and "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920), were well known in educated circles in India and Bengal by the early 1920s, and there is evidence that Tagore was aware of psychoanalytic ideas even if he did not engage with them systematically.

The psychological dynamics of *Raktakarobi*, particularly the analysis of desire, fantasy, and the relationship between unconscious drives and social behavior, have clear resonances with Freudian concepts. The King's fascination with Nandini, his simultaneous desire to possess her and his awareness that possession would destroy what he desires, can be read as a dramatization of the dynamic that Freud analyzed as the compulsion to repeat, the tendency to reenact the original scene of desire and loss rather than to work through it toward a new relationship with the object of desire. The workers' attachment to the very system that oppresses them can be read as a dramatization of what Freud analyzed as the death drive, the tendency of human beings under certain conditions to seek the reduction of tension and the cessation of striving rather than the expansion of life.

These resonances do not mean that Tagore's play is simply an illustration of Freudian psychoanalytic theory. But they do suggest that the psychological dimensions of the play are more complex and more theoretically interesting than either a purely political allegorical reading or a purely philosophical Vedantic reading would recognize. Kafi's analysis of these psychological dimensions, drawing on both Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalytic frameworks, represents one of the most valuable contributions of his scholarship to the understanding of *Raktakarobi*.

8.3 Hope, Utopia, and the Aesthetic Surplus of Raktakarobi

The final philosophical dimension of *Raktakarobi* that Kafi's analysis addresses is the question of hope and utopian imagination. Despite its tragic structure, the play is not a text of despair. Nandini's vitality, her insistence on the red oleanders, her refusal to be fully incorporated into the system of *Yakshapuri*, represents a form of resistance that the play presents as genuinely transformative even in the face of defeat. The question is what kind of hope this represents and what relationship it bears to the political project of transforming the actual historical world rather than merely imagining an alternative to it.

Ernst Bloch's philosophy of hope, his analysis of the "not-yet-conscious" dimension of human experience that anticipates what is not yet actual, provides the most illuminating theoretical framework for engaging with this dimension of *Raktakarobi*. Bloch argues that the utopian imagination, the capacity to envision what is not yet but could be, is not a mere escapist fantasy but a genuine cognitive faculty that grasps the real possibilities latent in the present historical moment and projects them forward into the future. Literary art, on Bloch's analysis, is a particularly important vehicle for this utopian imagination because it can give vivid and concrete form to possibilities that remain abstract and indeterminate in political discourse.

Raktakarobi's utopian content, the vision of a world in which the workers of Yakshapuri recover their names and their identities, in which the natural world represented by the red oleanders is no longer subordinated to the demands of the gold mines, in which desire and creativity are no longer suppressed in the service of capital accumulation, is not presented as a fully worked-out political program. It is presented as an aesthetic experience, as a vision that the play makes imaginatively real for its audience in a way that is intended to activate their own capacity for utopian imagination and to deepen their understanding of what they are struggling for and why it matters.

Kafi's analysis of this utopian dimension of Raktakarobi connects the specific aesthetic analysis of the play to the broader political philosophy of the Marxian tradition, showing how the play's aesthetic achievement serves the political purposes of the left not by providing a blueprint for political action but by deepening and vivifying the understanding of what human liberation means and what is at stake in the struggle for it.

8.4 Synthesis: What Raktakarobi Contributes to the Political and Philosophical Tradition

Any adequate evaluation of Kafi's reading of Raktakarobi must assess what the play itself, as read through Kafi's analytical lens, contributes to the political and philosophical tradition of Bengali Marxian literary culture. Several claims can be made with confidence.

First, Raktakarobi demonstrates that the literary tradition of Bengali modernism, even in its most aesthetically ambitious and philosophically complex forms, is not simply the cultural expression of a liberal humanist intelligentsia divorced from the concerns of the laboring majority. At its best, as in Raktakarobi, it is a profound engagement with the fundamental human questions that capitalist modernity raises, an engagement that draws on the deepest resources of both indigenous and Western philosophical traditions in ways that produce genuine insight into the human costs of the system and the human possibilities that the system suppresses.

Second, the play demonstrates that the relationship between aesthetic quality and political significance is not one of tension or opposition but of mutual reinforcement. Raktakarobi is both one of Tagore's greatest dramatic achievements and one of the most politically illuminating texts in the Bengali literary tradition, and these two dimensions of its significance are inseparable. The play achieves its political significance precisely through its aesthetic power, and vice versa.

Third, Kafi's reading of the play demonstrates that the tradition of Bengali Marxian literary scholarship is capable of doing justice to both dimensions simultaneously, of producing analyses that are at once aesthetically sensitive and politically engaged, that neither reduce the literary text to its political content nor abstract it from the political significance that gives it its historical importance.

PART THREE: READING LANGOL

CHAPTER NINE: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF LANGOL: CLASS, LAND, AND LABOR IN 1925 BENGAL

9.1 The Agrarian Question in Bengal

Langol, the journal of the Labour Swaraj Party edited by Kazi Nazrul Islam in 1925-1926, addresses most directly and most explicitly of the three texts in Kafi's book the specific economic conditions of the Bengali peasantry and working class in the mid-1920s. The agrarian question, the question of land, of its distribution, of the conditions under which peasants worked it, of the surplus extracted from agricultural production and the social relations of exploitation that governed that extraction, was one of the most pressing political questions in Bengal in this period and one of the central concerns of Langol.

To understand the political economy within which Langol operates, it is necessary to understand the specific structure of agrarian relations in Bengal in the 1920s. The zamindari system, established by the British Permanent Settlement of 1793, had created a class of large landowners who collected revenue from peasant cultivators in exchange for a fixed payment to the colonial government. By the 1920s, this system had produced an enormously complex and exploitative structure of sub-infeudation, in which the original zamindars had sub-let their rights to a series of intermediate tenure-holders, each extracting their own share of the surplus from the peasants at the bottom of the hierarchy.

The Bengal peasantry in the 1920s was thus subject to multiple layers of economic extraction, from the zamindars and their agents at the local level to the colonial fiscal system at the national level. This multiple exploitation was compounded by the specific vulnerability of the peasantry to the fluctuations of agricultural prices and to the vagaries of the monsoon, which could reduce a family from subsistence to starvation in a single bad season. The condition of the sharecroppers (bargadars) was particularly precarious: they worked land they did not own on terms that typically required them to surrender half or more of their crop to the landlord, leaving them with barely enough to survive in normal years and nothing in bad ones.

Langol's political intervention in this context was to insist on the centrality of the agrarian question to any genuine politics of liberation, to argue that the nationalism of the Indian National Congress, which primarily represented the interests of the urban professional and commercial classes, was inadequate to the demands of the peasant majority, and to call for a form of politics that would directly address the specific conditions of exploitation under which the peasantry lived and labored.

9.2 Nazrul's Political Economy: Intuition or Analysis?

The question of the analytical depth of Langol's political economy is one that Kafi addresses with some care in his scholarly work. Nazrul was not a trained economist. He had not read Capital or the Marxian tradition of political economy systematically. His engagement with economic questions was shaped primarily by direct experience of poverty and exploitation, by a passionate moral response to injustice, and by the general ideas of the labour and socialist

movements that he had absorbed through his political activities and his reading of progressive journalism.

This raises the question of whether Langol's political economy represents genuine analytical insight or merely the expression of moral outrage at the surface phenomena of exploitation without any deeper understanding of the structural dynamics that produce those phenomena. This question is important not merely for the evaluation of Langol as a text but for the broader question of the relationship between theoretical analysis and political experience in the tradition of left politics.

Kafi's position on this question is characteristically nuanced. He does not claim that Langol provides the equivalent of a systematic Marxian economic analysis. But he argues that the specific ways in which the journal addresses the agrarian question, the specific connections it draws between the condition of the peasantry and the broader structures of colonial exploitation, the specific demands it makes for land reform and worker representation, reflect a form of practical political understanding that, while not theoretically systematic, is genuine and historically significant. The test of a political analysis is not only its theoretical consistency but its practical effectiveness, and Langol's contribution to the development of agrarian radicalism in Bengal, measured by its influence on subsequent political movements and on the consciousness of the communities it addressed, is a significant one.

This argument connects to the broader theoretical question about the relationship between intellectual analysis and political experience in the Marxian tradition. Marx himself was insistent that the starting point for any genuine understanding of social reality was not abstract theory but the analysis of actual social conditions as experienced by those who lived within them. Langol's grounding in the direct experience of poverty and exploitation is therefore not a limitation relative to the theoretical sophistication of academic Marxism. It is, in a specific sense, a prerequisite for the kind of analysis that is most directly connected to the real conditions of the people whose liberation it is concerned with.

9.3 The Labour Swaraj Party and the Limits of Bengali Radical Politics

The Labour Swaraj Party, whose journal Langol was, represents one of the earliest attempts in Bengal to create a specifically class-based political party that would address the interests of the peasantry and the working class independently of the Congress nationalism that had dominated the political field since the early twentieth century. Understanding the specific political project of the Labour Swaraj Party and its relationship to the broader landscape of Bengali and Indian radical politics in the mid-1920s is essential for understanding what Langol was attempting to achieve as a political intervention.

The political context of the mid-1920s in India was one of fragmentation and reorganization following the suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1922. The Congress party was internally divided between those who wanted to maintain the strategy of non-cooperation and those who favored participation in the colonial legislative councils. Various radical groups, including the Hindustan Republican Association, the nascent Communist Party of India, and various labor and peasant organizations, were developing alternative political strategies.

The Labour Swaraj Party's specific position in this landscape was to insist that swaraj (self-rule) without social and economic liberation was merely a transfer of power from British colonial rulers to Indian elites, and that genuine liberation required a fundamental transformation of the social and economic structure of Indian society. This position was politically radical but also politically marginal in the mid-1920s, given the dominance of the Congress nationalist project and the relatively undeveloped state of class consciousness and organization among the Indian peasantry and working class.

Kafi's analysis of Langol in this political context is historically informed and politically sympathetic without being hagiographic. He acknowledges both the genuine radicalism of the Labour Swaraj Party's position and the real limitations of its organizational capacity and its theoretical framework. He reads Langol as an important early document in the development of agrarian radicalism in Bengal, one that anticipates several of the key themes that would later be developed more fully by the Communist Party and the peasant movement organizations of the 1930s and 1940s.

9.4 Langol and the Kisan Movement: A Historical Connection

The relationship between Langol and the subsequent development of the kisan (peasant) movement in Bengal is one of the most interesting historical questions that Kafi's analysis raises. The All India Kisan Sabha, founded in 1936 with significant Bengali participation, and the Tebhaga Movement of 1946-1947, which mobilized Bengali sharecroppers around the demand for a two-thirds share of the crop, represent the most significant expressions of agrarian radicalism in Bengal in the mid-twentieth century. How directly do these movements connect to the tradition of political journalism and political agitation represented by Langol?

The answer, as Kafi's analysis suggests, is complex. The direct organizational connections between the Labour Swaraj Party of the 1920s and the kisan movements of the 1930s and 1940s are not straightforward, given the fragmentation and reorganization of the Bengali left that occurred in the intervening years. But at the level of ideas, of the specific political vocabulary, the specific demands, and the specific understanding of the agrarian question that shaped the kisan movement, there are clear lines of continuity that connect the tradition of Langol to the later movement.

This question of historical connection and intellectual influence is important for the broader project of constructing a usable history of the Bengali left, a history that can provide intellectual resources for the renewal of left politics in the contemporary period. The tradition of agrarian radicalism that Langol represents is not merely a historical curiosity. It is a reservoir of political experience, of organizational learning, and of cultural resources that the contemporary left can draw on in addressing the continuing problems of rural poverty, agrarian crisis, and peasant mobilization that remain central to the political situation of West Bengal and India more broadly.

CHAPTER TEN: LANGUAGE, COMMUNITY, AND POLITICAL IDENTITY IN LANGOL

10.1 Who Is the Audience for Langol?

The question of Langol's intended audience is both empirically interesting and theoretically significant. The journal was explicitly aimed at the peasantry and working class of Bengal, and the specific ways in which it constructs its implied audience reflect important assumptions about the relationship between political communication and class identity.

The language of Langol is notably simpler and more direct than the language of Dhumketu. Where Dhumketu deployed a rich literary vocabulary that drew on the resources of the classical Bengali literary tradition, Langol uses a more vernacular idiom that is closer to the spoken language of the communities it addresses. This linguistic register is not accidental. It reflects a specific theory of political communication: that effective political agitation among the peasantry and working class requires a language that speaks directly to their experience and that does not create barriers of linguistic complexity between the political message and its intended recipients.

This theory of communication raises important theoretical questions about the relationship between language, class, and political consciousness. The tradition of working-class education, from the Chartist movement in Britain through the socialist educational institutions of the early twentieth century in various countries, has been divided between those who argue that the most important task is to make the full resources of the dominant culture available to the working class, and those who argue that working-class political consciousness requires the development of a specifically working-class cultural form that does not simply reproduce the cultural hierarchies of the existing order.

Langol's specific approach to this question, combining political analysis expressed in relatively simple and direct language with the aesthetic and cultural resources that Nazrul brings to everything he writes, represents a specific resolution of this tension that is worth careful analysis. It is not simply a matter of making the elite culture accessible to the masses, nor of rejecting elite culture in favor of pure popular forms. It is an attempt to create a political-cultural synthesis that draws on multiple traditions in the service of a specific political project.

10.2 The Concept of Swaraj: Between Independence and Liberation

The concept of swaraj, which appears in both the name of the Labour Swaraj Party and in the political vocabulary of Langol, is one of the most politically contested terms in the history of Indian political thought. Its meanings range from political independence from British colonial rule, in the limited sense of national self-determination, to a much more radical vision of self-governance that encompasses economic, social, and spiritual dimensions of human liberation.

Gandhi's specific interpretation of swaraj, which dominated the nationalist movement of the 1920s, emphasized the combination of political independence and personal moral transformation, seeing the cultivation of inner discipline and self-control (represented by hand-spinning) as both a means and an end of the struggle for political freedom. This interpretation was deeply influential but also deeply limiting from the perspective of the Labour Swaraj Party, because it tended to subordinate questions of economic justice and class exploitation to the broader nationalist project of political independence.

Langol's use of the term *swaraj* insists on a different and more radical meaning: that genuine self-rule requires not only political independence from colonial authority but liberation from all forms of economic exploitation and social domination, including the exploitation of the peasantry by the zamindari system and the domination of the Muslim minority by Hindu *bhadralok* cultural hegemony. This extended meaning of *swaraj* connects the political demand for independence to a broader vision of human liberation that has affinities with the Marxian tradition without being reducible to it.

Kafi's analysis of Langol's deployment of the *swaraj* concept illuminates the specific philosophical and political work that the concept performs in the journal's political argument. His analysis connects the specific Bengali political vocabulary of Langol to the broader tradition of political philosophy in which concepts of freedom, self-determination, and liberation are theorized, showing how the specific articulation of *swaraj* in Langol represents both a creative development within the indigenous tradition of political thought and a convergence with international traditions of radical democratic and socialist politics.

10.3 Religion and Class in Langol: Navigating the Dual Marginalization

The Muslim Bengali peasantry that Langol primarily addresses was subject to a double marginalization: the economic marginalization of the peasant class within the colonial capitalist system, and the cultural and political marginalization of the Muslim community within a Hindu-dominated nationalist movement. Understanding how Langol navigates this dual marginalization is essential for understanding both the specific achievements and the specific limitations of its political intervention.

The problem of dual marginalization raises a fundamental question of political priority: which form of marginalization is primary, and which should be the primary focus of political mobilization? The class analysis would suggest that economic exploitation is primary and that the organization of the peasantry around their common economic interests, cutting across religious lines, is the most effective political strategy. The communal analysis would suggest that the specific political vulnerability of the Muslim minority requires a specifically communal political organization that addresses the interests of the Muslim community as such.

Langol's political project attempts to avoid this either-or choice by insisting that genuine liberation requires addressing both dimensions of marginalization simultaneously. The journal argues for both agrarian reform that would benefit the peasantry regardless of religious identity and for the political representation of the Muslim community as a community within the nationalist movement. This attempt to hold together class politics and communal politics is politically ambitious but also potentially unstable, because the demands of class solidarity and the demands of communal solidarity can and do come into conflict.

Kafi's analysis of this tension in Langol is one of the most politically sensitive and most theoretically sophisticated aspects of his scholarly work. He does not resolve the tension by declaring one side definitively correct. Instead, he analyzes the specific historical conditions that produced it, the genuine political logic of each position, and the specific ways in which Langol attempts to navigate between them. This analysis is directly relevant to the contemporary debates

about the relationship between class politics and identity politics that are central to the renewal of left political strategy globally, and it is one of the ways in which Kafi's historical scholarship speaks most directly to the political questions of the present.

10.4 Langol's Literary Dimension: The Aesthetic of Political Urgency

Despite the more explicitly political and analytical character of Langol in comparison to Dhumketu, the journal retains significant literary and aesthetic dimensions that are central to its political effectiveness and that Kafi's analysis addresses with care. Nazrul's contributions to Langol include poetry and literary prose as well as political journalism, and the relationship between the aesthetic and the analytical in these contributions is a question that bears directly on the tradition of Marxian literary aesthetics within which Kafi works.

The aesthetic of political urgency that characterizes Langol's literary dimension is different from the aesthetic of revolutionary fire that characterizes Dhumketu. Where Dhumketu deploys imagery of cosmic disruption and apocalyptic transformation, Langol tends toward imagery that is more earthy, more rooted in the specific landscape and culture of rural Bengal, more directly connected to the embodied experience of agricultural labor and peasant life.

This difference in aesthetic register reflects a difference in political strategy. Dhumketu sought to inspire revolutionary consciousness through the activation of the highest registers of political passion, drawing on the traditions of Islamic devotional poetry and Romantic revolutionary rhetoric to create an experience of political illumination that would transcend the boundaries of everyday political calculation. Langol seeks to build political consciousness through a different approach, grounding political argument in the specific experiences and cultural resources of the peasant community it addresses, using the aesthetic resources of that community's own tradition to give political meaning to what might otherwise appear as merely personal or local grievances.

The theoretical question that this difference raises is one of the most interesting in the aesthetics of political communication: is there a single aesthetic of political effectiveness, a universal form that political art must take to be politically powerful? Or are there multiple aesthetic strategies, each appropriate to different political contexts and different political audiences? Kafi's analysis of Langol's aesthetic dimension argues implicitly for the latter position, showing how the specific aesthetic choices of Langol are not merely different from those of Dhumketu but differently appropriate to the specific political context and the specific audience that Langol addresses.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE UNITY OF THREE TEXTS: KAFI'S SYNTHETIC ANALYTICAL VISION

11.1 Why These Three Texts Together?

The most fundamental analytical decision in Kafi's book is the decision to read Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol as a constellation of texts that illuminate each other and that together

illuminate something about the political and cultural possibilities of Bengali literary culture in the early 1920s that none of them illuminates alone. This synthetic analytical vision is the most distinctive and most philosophically interesting aspect of Kafi's scholarly project, and it deserves sustained analysis in its own right.

The three texts represent, on the surface, very different kinds of cultural production. *Dhumketu* is a political newspaper, written for agitation and mobilization. *Raktakarobi* is a literary play, written for theatrical performance and aesthetic contemplation. *Langol* is a movement journal, written for the political education of a specific constituency. They have different implied audiences, different formal conventions, different relationships to the aesthetic traditions of Bengali culture, and different immediate political purposes.

What they share is historical: they were all produced within a period of approximately three years (1922-1925) in the same historical context of colonial Bengal undergoing social transformation and political crisis. They also share, at a deeper level, a set of common concerns: about the relationship between human vitality and the forces that suppress it, about the possibility and the conditions of liberation, about the specific forms that exploitation takes in the colonial context, and about the cultural and political resources available for resistance to that exploitation.

Kafi's argument for reading these three texts together is that the specific ways in which they address these common concerns illuminate aspects of each that would remain less visible in isolated readings. The contrast between Tagore's philosophical-aesthetic allegory and Nazrul's agitational journalism highlights the question of the relationship between different modes of political-cultural production and their different audiences and effects. The contrast between *Dhumketu*'s fiery nationalism and *Langol*'s class-focused agrarianism highlights the question of the different political logics available for mobilizing resistance to colonial exploitation. The contrast between all three texts and the subsequent tradition of progressive literature illuminates what was specifically possible and specifically significant in the historical moment of the early 1920s.

11.2 The Concept of a Cultural Constellation

The theoretical framework of the "constellation" as an analytical concept is associated primarily with Walter Benjamin, who uses it in his *Passagenwerk* and elsewhere to describe the juxtaposition of heterogeneous historical elements in ways that illuminate their specific historical significance through their relationship to each other rather than through their individual properties. A constellation is not a narrative, not a linear development from one point to another. It is a spatial and relational arrangement in which meaning is produced through the specific pattern of connections and tensions between the elements.

Kafi's bringing together of *Dhumketu*, *Raktakarobi*, and *Langol* has something of the character of a Benjaminian constellation. The three texts do not tell a single story about the development of Bengali radical culture from one form to another. They represent different and in some respects incompatible visions of what the relationship between literature and politics could be, what kinds of language and form are appropriate for addressing the political crises of the colonial

world, and what the specific resources and limitations of the Bengali literary and cultural tradition are for the project of political liberation.

Reading them together, as Kafi does, allows the tensions between these different visions to become productive rather than merely contradictory. The political urgency of Dhumketu challenges the aesthetic contemplation of Raktakarobi to account for its own relationship to political action. The philosophical depth of Raktakarobi challenges the agitational directness of Dhumketu to engage with the larger philosophical questions about human nature and social transformation that mere agitation cannot address. And Langol's grounding in the specific economic conditions of the peasantry challenges both the other texts to account for the material realities that philosophical allegory and revolutionary rhetoric both tend to abstract from.

This productive tension between the three texts is not resolved in Kafi's analysis into a single synthetic position. It is maintained as a tension, because it is precisely this tension that constitutes the intellectual richness of the constellation and that makes reading the three texts together more illuminating than reading any one of them alone.

11.3 The Dialectics of Form and Content Across the Three Texts

One of the most philosophically interesting aspects of Kafi's synthetic analysis is his attention to the specific ways in which form and content interact differently in each of the three texts, and what these differences reveal about the relationship between aesthetic form and political function.

In Dhumketu, form and content are in a relationship of mutual reinforcement: the fiery, disruptive formal qualities of the writing enact at the level of style the revolutionary transformation that the content demands at the level of political argument. The newspaper's formal hybridity, its mixing of poetic and prosaic registers, its refusal of the conventional distinctions between literary and journalistic writing, is itself a political statement, a demonstration in practice of the kind of cultural transformation that the paper advocates in theory.

In Raktakarobi, form and content are in a more complex and more ambivalent relationship. The play's formal sophistication, its intricate symbolism, its complex dramatic structure, its demanding aesthetic vision, are both the vehicles through which its political critique is expressed and the marks of its distance from the immediate political struggles of the laboring poor. The beauty of the play, its genuine aesthetic achievement, is simultaneously its political strength and its political limitation: it makes the play capable of illuminating the human costs of capitalism with extraordinary depth and power, while also making it accessible primarily to the educated audiences who have the cultural capital to engage with its formal complexity.

In Langol, form and content are in a different kind of tension: the simplification of form that the journal's political strategy requires is in tension with the aesthetic ambitions that Nazrul brings to everything he writes. The challenge Langol faces is to create a form that is both politically accessible and aesthetically vital, that does not sacrifice either the directness of its political

communication or the artistic quality that gives political language its power to move and persuade.

11.4 The Title Revisited: Death and Life as Dialectical Concepts

Returning to the title of Kafi's book, "Mrityuke Dak Jibon Pane" (Summoning Death Toward Life), it is now possible to understand with greater depth and precision the philosophical work that this title performs. The title announces a specific dialectical logic that runs through all three texts and that connects the specific political interventions of the early 1920s to the broader philosophical tradition of Marxian dialectics.

Death, in the title, refers to the various forms of social death that colonial capitalism inflicts on its subjects: the death of human dignity in the system of numbered workers, the death of communal solidarity in the violence of communal conflict, the death of peasant autonomy in the extractive logic of the zamindari system, the death of genuine cultural expression in the subordination of all human activity to the demands of colonial exploitation and the accumulation of wealth.

Life, in the title, refers to the various forms of vital resistance that the three texts embody and celebrate: Nandini's red oleanders in Yakshapuri, Nazrul's revolutionary fire in Dhumketu, the peasant community's demand for just treatment in Langol. These are not merely metaphors for political resistance. They are specific cultural and political practices that resist the logic of social death by insisting on the value of human vitality, creative expression, and communal solidarity against all the forces that seek to suppress them.

The dialectical relationship between death and life that the title announces is not a simple opposition but a genuine dialectical tension in which each term is constituted by its relationship to the other. Social death, the death of human dignity and human community under capitalism and colonialism, is the condition that makes the call to life necessary. And the call to life, the assertion of human vitality and human solidarity against the forces of death, is the condition that makes the recognition of social death politically productive rather than merely despairing. This dialectical logic is the philosophical core of Kafi's reading of all three texts, and it is what makes his analysis genuinely philosophical rather than merely literary-critical.

CHAPTER TWELVE: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TRILOGY: WHAT KAFI'S SCHOLARSHIP CONTRIBUTES TO THE GLOBAL DEBATE

12.1 Bengali Marxian Literary Scholarship and the Global Academy

Kafi's analysis of the three texts raises important questions about the relationship between specifically located intellectual work and the global academic community. His scholarship is produced in Bengali, within the specific intellectual culture of Jadavpur University and the tradition of Bengali Marxian literary criticism, and it addresses a specific set of texts that are primarily known within the Bengali-speaking world. How does this scholarship relate to the

broader global debates in literary theory, political philosophy, and cultural studies that are conducted primarily in English and that constitute the dominant intellectual discourse of the global academy?

This question is not merely a pragmatic one about access and circulation. It is a philosophical question about the nature of intellectual work and the relationship between particular and universal knowledge. Any serious intellectual work begins from a particular location, draws on particular traditions, addresses particular objects, and is shaped by particular historical conditions. The question is whether and how it can transcend these particularities to make contributions to broader intellectual debates.

The tradition of Marxian literary scholarship provides one answer to this question, in the form of its insistence on the universal significance of particular historical analysis. Marx's own work demonstrates that the most penetrating analysis of the universal dynamics of capitalism proceeds through the most detailed and specific analysis of the particular forms that those dynamics take in specific historical contexts. *Capital* is not a work of abstract economic theory that deduces its conclusions from universal principles. It is a work of historical analysis that uncovers universal dynamics through the most painstaking attention to the specific history of English industrial capitalism.

Similarly, Kafi's analysis of the three texts is not merely a contribution to the specific tradition of Bengali literary scholarship. It is, in its best moments, a contribution to the universal tradition of Marxian cultural analysis, illuminating through the specific case of Bengali literary culture in the early 1920s broader questions about the relationship between literary form and political function, between aesthetic achievement and political commitment, between the resources of cultural tradition and the demands of political transformation.

12.2 The Contribution to Postcolonial Literary Theory

Kafi's approach to his three texts also makes a specific contribution to the broader field of postcolonial literary theory, one that is different from and in some respects in tension with the dominant strands of that field as it has developed in the anglophone academy.

The dominant strands of postcolonial literary theory, associated with figures like Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, have tended to focus on questions of cultural hybridity, subject formation, the ambivalence of colonial discourse, and the limits of representation. These are important questions, and the theoretical frameworks developed for addressing them have made genuine contributions to the understanding of colonial and postcolonial cultural dynamics. But they have also tended, as critics like Aijaz Ahmad and Vivek Chibber have argued, to underemphasize the economic and class dimensions of colonialism and to overemphasize the cultural and psychological dimensions in ways that disconnect the analysis of colonial culture from the analysis of colonial political economy.

Kafi's approach, rooted in the tradition of Marxian literary analysis, insists on maintaining the connection between cultural and economic analysis. His reading of the three texts is attentive to the cultural and literary dimensions of the texts, to their specific formal qualities and their

specific deployments of symbolic language, but it analyzes these cultural and literary dimensions in the context of the specific economic and political conditions of colonial Bengal. This methodological insistence represents a specific contribution to postcolonial literary theory, one that challenges the field's tendency to cultural idealism by maintaining the materialist grounding that the Marxian tradition demands.

12.3 The Contribution to Marxian Aesthetics

Within the more specific tradition of Marxian literary aesthetics, Kafi's scholarship contributes a particular approach to the question of the relationship between form and content, between aesthetic quality and political significance, that is both theoretically coherent and practically illuminating.

The dominant debates in Marxian aesthetics have tended to oscillate between two poles: a formalist pole, associated primarily with Adorno's negative aesthetics, that insists on the relative autonomy of aesthetic form from political content and that sees the most politically significant art as that which refuses the simplifications of agitprop; and a content-oriented pole, associated with the realist tradition from Lukacs through socialist realism, that insists on the primacy of political content and that sees the most politically significant art as that which most directly and most accessibly represents the social contradictions of capitalism.

Kafi's analysis of the three texts refuses this binary. By reading Dhumketu's agitational journalism, Raktakarobi's aesthetic complexity, and Langol's movement journalism as equally legitimate and equally significant modes of political-cultural production, he implicitly argues that the question of political significance in literature cannot be decided by the application of a single aesthetic standard. Different forms of cultural production are appropriate to different political contexts and different political functions, and the evaluation of their political significance must be conducted in terms of the specific relationship between their formal properties and the specific political work they are designed to perform.

This is not a merely relativist position, a claim that all cultural forms are equally significant or that no aesthetic judgments can be made. It is a position that insists on the importance of understanding aesthetic form in relation to political function and historical context, rather than applying abstract aesthetic standards derived from a single tradition or a single set of values.

12.4 Toward a Future Scholarship: What Kafi's Work Opens Up

The final question for this Part is the prospective one: what intellectual possibilities does Kafi's scholarship open up for the future development of Bengali Marxian literary analysis and for the broader tradition of politically committed literary scholarship?

Several directions suggest themselves. First, the methodology of reading texts as constellations rather than as isolated individual works can be applied to other historical moments and other literary traditions within Bengali culture, producing new insights into the relationships between different cultural forms and political functions. The literature of partition, for example, might be productively analyzed as a constellation of different kinds of texts, including not only canonical

literary works but also journalism, oral testimony, governmental records, and visual art, in ways that illuminate the specific political and psychological dynamics of that catastrophic historical moment.

Second, the insistence on the connection between literary analysis and political economy can be extended to the contemporary period, producing analyses of the relationship between Bengali literary culture in the age of neoliberalism and digital media and the specific economic and political conditions of the present moment. How are the pressures of the literary marketplace, the demands of the global English-language academy, and the political conditions of post-Left Front West Bengal shaping the possibilities of Bengali literary production today? These questions are directly relevant to the tradition that Kafi represents and to the future of Bengali Marxian literary scholarship.

Third, the synthetic approach that reads literary and non-literary texts together can be extended to include new kinds of cultural production: digital media, film, music, visual art, and performance. The political and aesthetic questions that Kafi addresses through his analysis of newspaper and play and movement journal are also addressed, in different forms, by Bengali filmmakers like Ritwik Ghatak and Mrinal Sen, by Bengali musicians in the traditions of Nazrul Geeti and Rabindra Sangeet and progressive song, and by the contemporary visual artists and digital media practitioners who are developing new forms of political-cultural expression for the twenty-first century. Extending the tradition of Marxian literary scholarship to engage with these newer forms of cultural production is one of the most important tasks for the future development of the tradition that Kafi represents.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS TO PART SIX: THE LIVING TEXT AND THE LIVING TRADITION

The twelve chapters of this Part have moved through a sustained close reading of Kafi's scholarship, attending at each stage to the specific analytical moves he makes, the theoretical frameworks he deploys, the historical evidence he marshals, and the larger philosophical and political claims his analysis is designed to support. We have read with him through three extraordinarily rich and complex cultural texts, attending to their historical contexts, their formal properties, their political dimensions, and their philosophical significance.

What emerges from this sustained engagement is a portrait of a scholar and a scholarship that are both genuinely significant and genuinely limited, that achieve real intellectual insights while being shaped by constraints that they do not fully transcend. This is not a surprising conclusion. It is the conclusion that any honest engagement with any serious intellectual work must reach, because no intellectual work transcends all the constraints of its historical and institutional situation. The question is not whether a body of scholarship has limitations but whether its achievements are genuine and whether its limitations are the kind that can be transcended through the continued development of the tradition it represents.

Kafi's analysis of the three texts achieves several genuine intellectual insights. It demonstrates the political significance of forms of cultural production that conventional literary criticism has tended to marginalize, particularly the political newspaper and the movement journal. It illuminates the specific historical moment of the early 1920s in Bengal as a moment of genuine intellectual and political creativity, a moment when the resources of the Bengali literary and cultural tradition were being mobilized in new and powerful ways in the service of the struggle against colonial exploitation. It develops a synthetic analytical framework that reads different kinds of cultural production together in ways that illuminate their mutual relationships and their common engagement with shared political and philosophical concerns. And it demonstrates, through its own practice, the possibility of a form of literary scholarship that is at once intellectually rigorous, historically informed, aesthetically sensitive, and politically committed.

These are significant achievements. They justify the claim that Kafi's scholarship represents a genuine contribution to the tradition of Bengali Marxian literary analysis and, through that tradition, to the broader global tradition of Marxian cultural criticism. They justify the attention that this textbook devotes to his work, and they justify the claim that understanding his scholarship is essential for understanding the specific form that politically engaged literary scholarship takes in the specific intellectual culture of Jadavpur University and the Bengali left in the early twenty-first century.

The limitations of his work are also real, as the preceding chapters have acknowledged at various points. The limited engagement with feminist theory, the relative absence of comparative global perspectives, the constraints of writing in Bengali for a primarily Bengali audience: these are genuine limitations that reduce the reach and the potential impact of his scholarship relative to what a more fully developed engagement with the broadest range of intellectual resources would allow.

But these limitations are not the final word. They are, rather, the starting point for the next generation of Bengali Marxian literary scholarship, the problems that future scholars working in the tradition that Kafi represents will need to address and overcome. The tradition is alive precisely because it has the intellectual resources and the political commitment to identify its own limitations honestly and to work toward their transcendence.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Compare the specific formal properties of *Dhumketu*, *Raktakarobi*, and *Langol* as political texts. What specific formal choices does each make, how are those choices related to the specific political function each text is designed to perform, and what do the differences reveal about the range of possible relationships between aesthetic form and political function?
2. Analyze the specific construction of "the people" in each of the three texts. What vision of political community does each text articulate, how do these visions differ from each other, and what does the comparison reveal about the different political logics available for mobilizing resistance in colonial Bengal in the early 1920s?

3. Apply Walter Benjamin's concept of the "constellation" to the reading of any two or more texts from the Bengali literary tradition of your choice. What specific insights does this analytical approach produce, and what are its limitations as a method of literary and cultural analysis?
4. Evaluate Kafi's approach to the relationship between form and content in his analysis of the three texts. Does his methodology succeed in doing justice to both the aesthetic and the political dimensions of the texts, or does it tend to prioritize one at the expense of the other?
5. Analyze the representation of women and gender in *Dhumketu*, *Raktakarobi*, and *Langol*. What vision of women's role in the anti-colonial and anti-capitalist struggle does each text present, and how do these visions reflect the specific limitations and possibilities of progressive political thought in the early 1920s?
6. Compare Tagore's vision of liberation in *Raktakarobi* with Nazrul's vision in *Dhumketu*. What are the specific philosophical and political differences between these visions, and what do those differences reveal about the relationship between aesthetic universalism and political specificity in the Bengali literary tradition?
7. Assess the contribution of Kafi's analysis of the three texts to the broader tradition of postcolonial literary theory. What specific insights does his Marxian approach offer that dominant postcolonial frameworks miss, and what specific insights do postcolonial frameworks offer that his Marxian approach tends to minimize?
8. Analyze the dialectical relationship between "death" and "life" in the title of Kafi's book. How is this dialectical logic expressed in each of the three texts, and what does it reveal about the specific philosophical foundations of Kafi's approach to the relationship between literature and political struggle?
9. Evaluate the argument that the inclusion of a political newspaper (*Dhumketu*) and a movement journal (*Langol*) alongside a canonical literary play (*Raktakarobi*) in a work of literary scholarship represents a legitimate methodological innovation. What are the strongest arguments for and against this methodological choice, and what implications does it have for the broader question of what counts as an appropriate object for literary and cultural analysis?
10. Consider the contemporary relevance of the political and cultural concerns addressed in *Dhumketu*, *Raktakarobi*, and *Langol*. Which of the specific questions they raise, about capitalism and dehumanization, about the relationship between nationalism and class politics, about the political function of aesthetic experience, about the mobilization of religious tradition for progressive politics, are most directly relevant to the political and cultural conditions of Bengal and India in 2025-2026, and why?
11. Analyze the psychological dimensions of *Raktakarobi* using both Freudian psychoanalytic concepts and Fanon's analysis of the psychology of colonial domination. What do these different frameworks illuminate about the play's representation of consciousness under conditions of systematic exploitation?
12. Compare Kafi's synthetic approach to reading multiple texts as a constellation with Franco Moretti's "distant reading" approach to world literature. What are the specific strengths and limitations of each approach, and what does the comparison reveal about the different ways in which scale and specificity can be combined in literary analysis?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

On the political journalism of Kazi Nazrul Islam: Nazrul's Bengali texts are not widely available in English translation, but some of his poetry from this period has been translated. Kazi Nazrul Islam's poetry is available in selections translated by various scholars; a starting point is the selection published by the Nazrul Institute in Dhaka. For the historical context of political journalism in colonial Bengal, Sumit Sarkar's "The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908" provides essential background, as does Partha Chatterjee's "Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World."

On Raktakarobi: Tagore's play is available in English translation as "Red Oleanders" in various editions. Amartya Sen's essay on Tagore in "The Argumentative Indian" provides an excellent introduction to his political and philosophical significance. Rustom Bharucha's "The Politics of Cultural Practice" includes a sophisticated analysis of Tagore's theater from a perspective that is both politically engaged and aesthetically sensitive.

On Walter Benjamin: Walter Benjamin's "Illuminations," edited by Hannah Arendt, provides access to the most important of his essays, including "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and "Theses on the Philosophy of History." His "Arcades Project" (Passagenwerk) provides the most complete account of his concept of the constellation and his method of historical analysis through juxtaposition. Susan Buck-Morss's "The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project" provides an excellent scholarly introduction.

On Marxian aesthetics: Terry Eagleton's "Marxism and Literary Criticism" provides a concise and accessible introduction to the main positions in the field. Fredric Jameson's "The Political Unconscious" represents the most sophisticated attempt to develop a Marxian hermeneutics adequate to the complexity of literary texts. Georg Lukacs's "The Theory of the Novel" and his essays on realism provide the most influential statements of the realist tradition within Marxian aesthetics. Theodor Adorno's "Aesthetic Theory" provides the most rigorous statement of the opposing tradition.

On Ernst Bloch: Ernst Bloch's "The Principle of Hope" (three volumes) is the essential text. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg's edited volume "The Utopian Function of Art and Literature" provides accessible extracts and commentary. Ruth Levitas's "The Concept of Utopia" situates Bloch's work in the broader tradition of utopian thought.

On the Bengal agrarian question: Sugata Bose's "Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure, and Politics, 1919-1947" provides the most detailed scholarly account of the agrarian conditions that Langol addresses. Iftekhhar Iqbal's "The Bengal Delta: Ecology, State and Social Change, 1840-1943" provides essential environmental and historical context. Partha Chatterjee's "The Present History of West Bengal: Essays in Political Criticism" addresses the continuing relevance of the agrarian question to contemporary West Bengali politics.

On law and literature: Martha Nussbaum's "Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life" is the most accessible statement of the argument for the relevance of literary imagination to legal reasoning. James Boyd White's "The Legal Imagination" provides the most detailed

account of the literary dimensions of legal reasoning. Richard Posner's "Law and Literature: A Misunderstood Relation" provides a skeptical account that is valuable as a critical counterweight to the more enthusiastic advocates of the field.

APPENDIX TO PART SIX: TEXTUAL CONCORDANCE OF KEY TERMS ACROSS THE THREE TEXTS

The following is a selective concordance of key political, philosophical, and aesthetic terms as they appear across the three texts analyzed in Kafi's book. The purpose of this concordance is to facilitate comparative analysis of the three texts and to illuminate the specific semantic ranges and political implications of key terms in their different contexts of use.

Azadi/Mukti (Freedom/Liberation): In Dhumketu, this term appears primarily in the context of national liberation from colonial rule, though with frequent resonances of personal and spiritual freedom. In Raktakarobi, freedom is primarily understood as the recovery of natural vitality and human creativity against the dehumanizing demands of the industrial system. In Langol, freedom is primarily understood in economic terms as liberation from the exploitation of the zamindari system and the colonial tax structure.

Kaam/Karmi (Work/Worker): In Dhumketu, work and workers are primarily invoked in the context of the distinction between productive and exploitative forms of social activity, with the colonial system represented as a system that extracts the fruits of productive labor without reciprocating with genuine social value. In Raktakarobi, work is represented through the allegorical figures of the numbered workers of Yakshapuri, whose dehumanization through the industrial system provides the central focus of the play's political critique. In Langol, work is analyzed in the most concrete and specific terms, with detailed attention to the specific forms of agricultural labor and their relationship to the extractive structures of the colonial agrarian economy.

Jiban/Mritu (Life/Death): The title's central opposition runs through all three texts in different registers. In Dhumketu, life and death are primarily understood in terms of the vitality of the revolutionary movement against the death of colonial subjugation. In Raktakarobi, life is represented through Nandini and the red oleanders, death through the numbered existence of the workers and the system of Yakshapuri. In Langol, life and death are primarily economic concepts: the threat of death through famine and poverty that the peasant faces when the extractive demands of the zamindari system exceed the productive capacity of the land.

Dharma (Religion/Duty/Law): In Dhumketu, dharma is invoked in a complex way that draws on both Islamic and Hindu concepts of religious duty, but insists that genuine religious obligation demands the struggle for justice and liberation rather than acquiescence in exploitation. In Raktakarobi, dharma is less explicitly invoked but is present in Tagore's Vedantic vision of the fundamental unity of consciousness that the system of Yakshapuri has violated. In Langol, dharma is primarily invoked in the context of the peasant community's sense

of its own rights and obligations, a sense of traditional justice that the zamindari system is understood to violate.

Sangram/Andolan (Struggle/Movement): In Dhumketu, struggle is understood primarily in terms of revolutionary confrontation with the forces of colonial power. In Raktakarobi, struggle takes the form of the individual resistance of Nandini against the system of Yakshapuri. In Langol, struggle is understood primarily in terms of organized collective action by the peasantry and working class in defense of their economic interests.

End of Appendix

Part Seven of this textbook will address: The Psychology of the Intellectual: Identity, Vocation, and the Inner Life of Political Commitment.

End of Part Six

PART SEVEN: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE INTELLECTUAL: IDENTITY, VOCATION, AND THE INNER LIFE OF POLITICAL COMMITMENT

PREFACE TO PART SEVEN

Part Six of this textbook completed the close textual and analytical engagement with Abdul Kafi's major published scholarship, attending to the specific methods, frameworks, historical evidence, and philosophical arguments that constitute the substance of his intellectual contribution to Bengali Marxian literary studies. We read with him through the three major texts that organize his book, attending to the formal and political dimensions of Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol, and we situated his analytical practice within the broader traditions of Marxian aesthetics, postcolonial criticism, and the long history of politically engaged literary scholarship in Bengal.

Part Seven turns inward. It asks not what Abdul Kafi has argued but what it means to be the kind of person who argues those things, in the kind of place where he argues them, under the kind of conditions that have shaped his intellectual and personal life. The focus shifts from the product of intellectual work to the psychology of intellectual life itself. We are concerned, in other words, with what Antonio Gramsci called the "inner life" of the organic intellectual: the motivations, the vocational commitments, the emotional and psychological pressures, the formations of identity and the challenges to that identity, that constitute the lived experience of being a politically committed scholar in the early twenty-first century.

This is not a simple undertaking. The psychology of intellectuals is a subject that has attracted significant scholarly attention, from Julien Benda's lament about the "treason of the clerks" in 1927 to Edward Said's rethinking of intellectual responsibility in the 1990s to contemporary

debates in the sociology of knowledge, the philosophy of academic life, and the psychology of political commitment. We draw on this scholarship extensively in the chapters that follow. But we also go beyond it in important ways, because the specific situation of a Bengali Marxist intellectual at Jadavpur University in the twenty-first century has dimensions that general theories of the intellectual do not fully capture.

The chapters of Part Seven address the following broad areas: the philosophical foundations of intellectual vocation and the question of what it means to be called to a life of the mind; the psychological dimensions of political commitment and the specific pressures that commitment creates; the relationship between identity, particularly the intersecting identities of religious affiliation, linguistic community, class, and professional position, and intellectual practice; the sociology and political economy of academic life in contemporary India and its psychological implications for scholars working in the humanities; the specific experience of violence that Abdul Kafi has undergone and its broader significance for understanding the social conditions of academic work; the legal and institutional dimensions of academic life and the psychological experience of navigating those dimensions as a committed intellectual; the comparative psychology of left intellectuals in different historical and national contexts; and the pedagogical dimensions of political commitment, understood as the psychology of the relationship between the intellectual and the student.

Throughout, we insist on the connection between the personal and the political, the psychological and the structural, the inner life and the outer world. The psychology of an intellectual cannot be understood apart from the social structures within which that intellectual works, and those social structures cannot be understood apart from the psychology of the individuals who inhabit, reproduce, challenge, and sometimes transform them. This dialectical relationship between inner life and outer world is, as we will see, itself one of the central themes of the Marxian intellectual tradition that Abdul Kafi represents. The tradition has always insisted that consciousness is not prior to or independent of social being, but it has also always insisted that consciousness is not merely a passive reflection of social being. Consciousness is active, contested, and historically significant. The psychology of the intellectual is, in the deepest sense, a political matter.

CHAPTER ONE: THE PHILOSOPHY OF VOCATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE CALLED TO THINK?

1.1 The Concept of Vocation and Its History

The word "vocation" comes from the Latin *vocare*, to call. In its original theological sense, a vocation was a calling from God, a summons to a particular life-path that was understood as divinely ordained and therefore as carrying a weight of obligation and significance beyond ordinary personal preference or professional calculation. The Protestant Reformation transformed this concept in ways that Max Weber famously analyzed in "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism." Where medieval Catholicism had reserved the concept of vocation for the religious life of priests and monks, Protestant theology extended it to secular occupations,

endowing the ordinary work of farming, trading, or governing with a quasi-sacred significance. One did not simply choose a job. One answered a call.

Weber's analysis of the Protestant transformation of the vocation concept is relevant to our discussion in a way that goes beyond mere historical illustration. Weber argued that the Protestant ethic of vocation, with its insistence on disciplined, rigorous, methodical work in a worldly calling as a sign of election and spiritual worth, was one of the cultural foundations of modern capitalism. The intense, ascetic, methodical devotion to one's calling that Protestant theology demanded was precisely the psychological disposition that capitalist economic organization required. In other words, the religious concept of vocation was one of the cultural mechanisms through which the psychological dispositions necessary for capitalist production were formed and reproduced.

But Weber also noted a profound irony in this process. The very devotion to one's calling that Protestant theology had endowed with spiritual significance was gradually stripped of that significance as capitalism matured and secularism advanced. What had been a divinely sanctioned vocation became merely a job, merely a means to a livelihood, merely a position in the division of labor. The "iron cage" of bureaucratic rationalism that Weber identified as the destination of capitalist modernity was a world in which the meaningful sense of vocation had been replaced by the routine performance of professionally specified tasks. The call had been bureaucratized.

This Weberian analysis sets the stage for understanding the specific character of intellectual vocation as a problem, because the intellectual's relationship to vocation has always been structured by precisely the tension between meaning and routine, between calling and job, between the inner imperative to think and the outer pressures of institutional conformity. When we ask what it means to be called to a life of the mind, we are asking about the survival of a meaningful sense of vocation in conditions that systematically threaten to replace it with bureaucratic routine.

1.2 The Marxian Critique of Vocation

The Marxian tradition offers a powerful critique of the concept of vocation that any serious discussion of intellectual life must engage. For Marx, the idea that one is "called" to a particular form of work is itself a product of the ideological mystification of the division of labor. In a society based on private property and the division of labor, the accidental circumstances of one's birth, the arbitrary cultural dispositions instilled by one's class position, and the imperatives of the labor market all determine what kinds of work one does. The idea that this socially determined and economically constrained work allocation reflects a divine calling or an inner essential nature is, for Marx, a form of false consciousness that serves to naturalize and legitimize what is in fact a contingent and exploitative social arrangement.

In "The German Ideology," Marx and Engels imagined a communist future in which the division of labor would be abolished and individuals would be free to pursue different activities according to their inclinations at different times: to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, criticize after dinner. The point of this somewhat playful image was to contrast the restricted, one-dimensional

existence imposed by the capitalist division of labor with the many-sided, fully human existence that liberation from that division would make possible. The concept of vocation, in the Marxian critique, is an ideological consolation for the reality of division: it persuades people that their restricted, socially imposed role is their authentic calling, thereby reconciling them to a social condition that a fully human life would transcend.

This critique is powerful and important. But it does not exhaust the subject. Several qualifications are necessary.

First, the critique of ideological vocation is not a critique of meaningful work as such. Marx distinguished between alienated labor, in which the worker's activity is appropriated by capital and experienced as external, hostile, and meaningless, and genuine, unalienated activity, in which the worker's activity is an expression of their own powers and is experienced as fulfilling and meaningful. The communist vision is not a vision of aimless leisure but a vision of activity that is both genuinely free and genuinely significant. In this sense, the Marxian critique of ideological vocation points toward, rather than away from, a more authentic sense of meaningful intellectual work.

Second, the historical reality of intellectual work under capitalism is more complex than a simple opposition between ideological vocation and alienated labor suggests. Intellectuals, including academic intellectuals, occupy a peculiar position in the capitalist division of labor. They produce knowledge, which is a form of cultural and intellectual capital, but they do so in institutions that are only partially integrated into the profit-making mechanisms of the capitalist economy. The relationship between intellectual work and the market is mediated by institutions, funding structures, professional norms, and cultural traditions that are not fully reducible to market imperatives. This means that the experience of intellectual work is often genuinely ambiguous: it can be experienced as alienating, routine, and externally imposed, but it can also be experienced as intrinsically meaningful, as genuinely called-for, as an expression of something deep in the intellectual's own powers and commitments. Both dimensions are real.

Third, and most importantly for our purposes, the specific form of intellectual vocation represented by the politically committed scholar, and represented in paradigmatic form by a Bengali Marxist literary scholar like Abdul Kafi, is not easily assimilated to the ideological vocation that the Marxian critique targets. The politically committed intellectual is not persuaded that their restricted social role reflects an eternal divine calling. On the contrary, they are acutely aware of the social conditions that have shaped their intellectual formation, and they understand their intellectual work as a form of political practice aimed at the transformation of those conditions. Their vocation is not a consolation for the division of labor but a critical engagement with it.

1.3 Said's Intellectual and the Question of Representation

Edward Said's Reith Lectures of 1993, published as "Representations of the Intellectual," offer one of the most searching and influential accounts of intellectual vocation in the late twentieth century, and they are directly relevant to the understanding of Abdul Kafi's position. Said drew

on a range of intellectual traditions, including Gramsci, Benda, and Foucault, but his account was distinctive in several ways that we need to examine.

Said's intellectual is defined not by a particular disciplinary position or institutional role but by a characteristic attitude: the attitude of the "amateur," the person who engages with ideas out of love and commitment rather than professional calculation; the attitude of the "outsider," the person who is never fully absorbed into any institution or system and who therefore retains the capacity for critical distance; and the attitude of the "exile," the person who is displaced from any comfortable home and who therefore sees the world from a vantage point of permanent estrangement.

The figure of exile is particularly important in Said's account, and it connects directly to the situation of intellectuals like Abdul Kafi in ways that we need to examine carefully. Said distinguished between literal exile, the physical displacement from one's homeland that has been the fate of so many writers and intellectuals in the twentieth century, and what he called a "metaphorical" or "intellectual" exile: the condition of being permanently out of place, permanently questioning, never fully at home in any received orthodoxy or institutional comfort.

For Said, the intellectual's exile was a condition of possibility for genuine critical thought. The person who is fully at home, who is fully integrated into the dominant culture and its institutions, lacks the distance necessary for genuine criticism. It is the outsider, the displaced, the marginalized, who sees most clearly what the insider takes for granted. This argument connects to a long tradition of sociological and philosophical reflection on the relationship between marginality and insight, from the sociological theory of the "stranger" developed by Georg Simmel and Alfred Schutz to the feminist epistemology of "standpoint theory" associated with Dorothy Smith and Sandra Harding.

How does this apply to Abdul Kafi? His intellectual exile, if we use Said's terminology, is multiple and overlapping. As a Muslim academic in a Bengali department historically shaped primarily by the Hindu bhadralok intelligentsia, he occupies a position that is never entirely "at home." As a Marxist in a country where the institutional left has been in serious decline since the 1990s, he works within a tradition that is increasingly marginalized by the dominant ideological currents of neoliberal India. As an academic in the humanities in a country increasingly driven by STEM-centric visions of development and a market-oriented conception of educational value, he works in a field that is structurally undervalued. As a teacher and researcher in a state-funded public university that is chronically underfunded relative to the demands placed upon it, he navigates institutional conditions that impose constant material constraints on intellectual work.

Each of these forms of marginality could be experienced as simply limiting, as an obstacle to be overcome or endured. But each can also be understood, in the Saidian sense, as a vantage point from which certain things are more clearly visible than they are from positions of institutional comfort. The Muslim Bengali Marxist literary scholar sees things about Bengali cultural history, about the relationship between religion and revolution, about the politics of language and the language of politics, that a less multiply marginalized scholar might not see with equal clarity. The question is not whether marginality is a good or a bad thing in the abstract, but whether and

how the specific forms of marginality that structure a given intellectual's position are turned into resources for insight rather than merely obstacles to professional advancement.

1.4 The Philosophical Dimensions of Teaching as Vocation

Among the multiple dimensions of intellectual vocation, the dimension of teaching deserves extended attention, because teaching is in many ways the most immediate and concrete form through which an academic intellectual's vocational commitment is expressed. Abdul Kafi is, before anything else, a teacher. He teaches undergraduate and postgraduate students of Bengali language and literature at Jadavpur University. This teaching takes place in classrooms, in seminars, in dissertation supervision, in informal conversations, and in the larger context of the departmental and institutional culture that he helps to shape and sustain.

What is the philosophical significance of teaching? This question has generated one of the richest bodies of reflection in the history of philosophy, from Plato's dialogues, which stage the relationship between Socrates and his interlocutors as the paradigmatic form of philosophical inquiry, to Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, which reconceives teaching as a political practice aimed at the liberation of the oppressed from the ideological conditioning that sustains their domination. Between these two poles, there are many other significant accounts of the relationship between teaching and philosophy, between pedagogy and politics.

For our purposes, the most relevant frameworks are those developed within the Marxian and critical traditions, because these are the frameworks most directly relevant to Abdul Kafi's own practice. Gramsci's account of the organic intellectual is fundamentally a pedagogical theory: the organic intellectual is, above all, a teacher, someone who facilitates the development of the critical consciousness of the class they represent and serve. Gramsci distinguished the traditional intellectual, who serves the dominant class by reproducing and legitimizing its worldview, from the organic intellectual, who serves the subaltern class by developing and articulating its worldview in forms adequate to the demands of political struggle. The organic intellectual's teaching is not merely the transmission of information or the cultivation of skills. It is the development of a critical, self-reflective, politically conscious subjectivity.

Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," first published in 1968 and one of the most influential educational texts of the twentieth century, offered a related but distinct account. Freire distinguished what he called the "banking model" of education, in which the teacher "deposits" knowledge into the passive student as if the student were an empty container, from what he called "problem-posing" or "dialogical" education, in which teachers and students engage together in a shared critical inquiry into their common world. For Freire, the banking model was ideologically conservative: it reproduced the passive, uncritical consciousness that was required for the maintenance of the oppressive social order. Problem-posing education was, by contrast, inherently liberatory: it generated the critical consciousness that was a precondition for transformative political action.

The implications of these pedagogical theories for the practice of a politically committed academic like Abdul Kafi are significant. If the vocation of the organic intellectual is fundamentally pedagogical, then the specific form that pedagogy takes in the classroom, in the

seminar, in the dissertation supervision, in the public lecture, is not merely a matter of professional technique but a political matter of the first importance. The question of how to teach is, at the same time, a question of what kind of consciousness one is trying to cultivate and what kind of world one is trying to build.

CHAPTER TWO: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ACADEMIC LIFE: UNDERSTANDING THE CONDITIONS OF INTELLECTUAL WORK

2.1 The Crisis of the Humanities in Neoliberal India

To understand the psychological conditions of Abdul Kafi's intellectual life, we must understand the political economy of academic life in contemporary India. This political economy has been transformed dramatically over the past three decades by the processes of neoliberal economic reform that began in 1991 and have accelerated, with various modifications and reversals, ever since. The transformation has had profound effects on universities, on disciplines, on academic labor, and on the psychological experience of scholars working in the humanities.

The neoliberal transformation of Indian higher education can be summarized in terms of several interrelated processes. First, there has been a shift toward a market-oriented conception of educational value, in which education is understood primarily as a means to individual economic advancement and the production of the human capital required by the economy, rather than as a public good with intrinsic social and cultural value. This shift has been reflected in funding priorities, curriculum development, institutional design, and the cultural valorization of different fields of study. STEM subjects and professional courses in management, engineering, and computing have been valorized as economically useful, while the humanities and social sciences have been systematically undervalued and underfunded.

Second, there has been a process of institutional differentiation that has divided Indian higher education into a small number of well-funded, globally oriented elite institutions and a large mass of underfunded, poorly resourced institutions serving the majority of students. Even the elite institutions, like Jadavpur University, have faced increasing pressure to compete in global rankings systems that measure research output in ways that are systematically biased toward STEM disciplines and toward English-medium scholarship. The pressure on humanities scholars to publish in internationally indexed journals, to compete for external grants, to demonstrate "impact" in terms that are primarily economic, and to orient their research toward questions that are legible within global disciplinary frameworks rather than specifically relevant to local conditions, has intensified dramatically.

Third, the expansion of contract and temporary labor has fundamentally changed the conditions of academic employment in India. The growth of guest faculty positions, ad hoc appointments, and various forms of contractual academic labor has created a large and growing precariat of highly educated scholars who lack the job security, institutional support, and professional recognition that permanent academic positions provide. Even among scholars who hold permanent positions, the conditions of academic labor have been intensified by increased

administrative demands, larger class sizes, growing bureaucratic requirements for assessment and accountability, and the erosion of the time available for genuine research and reflection.

Abdul Kafi, as an Assistant Professor with a permanent position at one of India's leading public universities, occupies a relatively privileged position within this labor market. But privilege is always relative, and even the relatively privileged face conditions that impose significant psychological pressures. The permanent pressure to produce research outputs that can be measured and assessed according to standardized metrics, the administrative burden of coordinating a centre with significant institutional responsibilities while also carrying a full teaching load, the intellectual isolation that results from working in a tradition that is simultaneously marginalized by dominant academic culture and deeply committed to engagement with that culture's limitations: all of these pressures shape the psychological experience of intellectual work in ways that deserve sustained attention.

2.2 Funding, Infrastructure, and the Material Conditions of Research

The material conditions of research in the Indian humanities deserve specific attention because they are both poorly understood outside India and directly relevant to the kind of scholarship that Abdul Kafi and his colleagues are able to produce. The picture that emerges is complex and, in some respects, genuinely difficult.

Jadavpur University receives funding from both the West Bengal state government and the central government through the University Grants Commission (UGC). It also receives project-specific funding from a range of national and international sources. But the overall funding levels for arts and humanities research in Indian universities have been chronically inadequate relative to the demands placed on scholars and institutions. The UGC's research funding mechanisms have been criticized for their bureaucratic complexity, their slow disbursement processes, their bias toward certain kinds of research output, and their inadequate scale relative to the actual costs of serious scholarly work.

Library resources present a particular challenge. Serious literary and cultural research requires access to historical archives, rare texts, journals, and books that are often simply not available in Indian university libraries. The digitization of some collections has helped, but significant barriers remain, both in terms of access to digital resources that require expensive subscriptions and in terms of access to physical archives that are located in different cities or countries. The Jadavpur University library is one of the better-resourced humanities libraries in India, but it still falls significantly short of what a first-class research university in Europe or North America would consider adequate for serious humanities scholarship.

The consequence of these material limitations is not that serious scholarship is impossible. As Part Six of this textbook demonstrated, Kafi's scholarship achieves genuine intellectual insights despite the constraints under which it is produced. But it does mean that the range and ambition of that scholarship is constrained in ways that would not apply if the material conditions were more favorable. The relatively limited engagement with non-Bengali scholarship, the absence of comparative global perspectives that extend beyond the most widely translated Western theoretical texts, the focus on a small number of canonical texts rather than a broader survey: all

of these features of Kafi's work reflect not merely intellectual choices but the practical constraints of research conducted under conditions of limited material support.

2.3 The Political Economy of Bengali-Language Scholarship

There is a further dimension of the political economy of academic life that is specifically relevant to Abdul Kafi's situation, and that is the political economy of writing in Bengali rather than in English. This is not merely a question of audience, though audience is important. It is a question of academic capital, of professional recognition, of institutional visibility, and of the distribution of intellectual labor in a global academy where English is the dominant medium of prestigious scholarly communication.

Scholars who write primarily in English benefit from a structural advantage in the contemporary global academy. Their work can circulate internationally, be cited in international journals, be assessed by the international rankings bodies whose evaluations increasingly determine funding and institutional status, and achieve the kind of "impact" that is recognized and rewarded by the academic labor market. Scholars who write primarily in vernacular languages are systematically disadvantaged in all of these respects, regardless of the intellectual quality of their work.

This structural disadvantage has real psychological consequences. The scholar who writes in Bengali knows that their work will not be recognized by the global academy in the way that equivalent work in English would be. They know that their publications will not count in the citation metrics that increasingly determine professional recognition and institutional funding. They know that they are, in a real sense, invisible to the global academic community that increasingly sets the standards for what counts as significant scholarship.

How should one understand this situation psychologically? There are at least two responses available. One is the response of assimilation or translation: the scholar writes in English, or at least translates their Bengali work into English, in order to enter the global academic market on terms that the market recognizes. This response has genuine benefits in terms of professional recognition and institutional visibility, but it also carries significant costs. Writing in a language that is not one's primary intellectual medium can introduce distortions into thought. More importantly, the translation of Bengali-language scholarship into English-language academic discourse often involves a loss of the specific historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts that give the work its depth and significance. The richness of Bengali literary culture, its specific idioms, its particular intellectual traditions, its distinctive relationships between aesthetic form and political content, do not translate easily into the standardized frameworks of international academic discourse.

The other response is the response of affirmation: the scholar writes in Bengali precisely because Bengali is the right language for the work they are doing, because their subject demands the resources and the nuances of the Bengali literary tradition, and because their primary responsibility is to the Bengali intellectual community rather than to the global academy's ranking systems. This is, broadly speaking, Abdul Kafi's response. He writes in Bengali, publishes with Bengali publishers, addresses himself primarily to a Bengali audience, and

participates in the intellectual culture of Bengal rather than primarily orienting himself toward international academic markets.

This choice carries its own psychological dimensions. It requires a kind of intellectual confidence, a willingness to accept the costs of marginalization in the global academic market in favor of a deeper engagement with one's primary intellectual and cultural community. It also requires a kind of political clarity about the relationship between language, culture, and intellectual work: an understanding that the language in which one thinks and writes is not merely a medium of communication but a medium of thought, and that the specific resources of the Bengali language and the Bengali literary tradition are not optional extras that could be replaced by English equivalents without significant intellectual loss.

CHAPTER THREE: IDENTITY, RELIGION, AND THE POLITICS OF THE SELF

3.1 The Problem of Identity in the Bengali Intellectual Tradition

The question of identity, specifically the question of how a Bengali Muslim intellectual navigates the complex intersections of religious affiliation, linguistic community, political commitment, and professional position, is one of the most important and most understudied dimensions of Abdul Kafi's intellectual life. It is understudied in part because it is difficult to address directly without either reducing a complex intellectual position to its identity coordinates or ignoring the ways in which identity fundamentally shapes intellectual possibility. We need to find a way to address this question that is neither reductive nor evasive.

The Bengali intellectual tradition has always been marked by a complex and contested relationship between religious identity and intellectual life. The nineteenth-century Bengali Renaissance was, in important ways, a project of Hindu reform and Hindu self-assertion. Figures like Rammohan Roy, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, and eventually Vivekananda were all, in different ways, engaged in the project of reimagining Hinduism in ways adequate to the demands of modernity. Tagore's universalism was also, at a deep level, shaped by the specific philosophical resources of Vedantic Hinduism, even as it transcended any narrow sectarian affiliation.

Muslim Bengali intellectuals have always had to navigate this terrain carefully. They have inhabited a literary and intellectual tradition shaped in important ways by Hindu cultural formations, while bringing to that tradition resources, perspectives, and commitments rooted in Muslim culture, history, and theology. Kazi Nazrul Islam, one of the most significant predecessors whom Abdul Kafi's work engages most directly, embodied this complex navigation in an exemplary way. Nazrul drew freely on both Islamic and Hindu cultural resources, celebrated both Eid and Durga Puja in his poetry, and explicitly rejected the communal divisions that would eventually tear Bengal apart. His Islam was a revolutionary Islam, a religion of resistance and liberation rather than of quietism and conformity. His Bengali was a Bengali that acknowledged and celebrated its multilingual, multicultural roots.

Abdul Kafi inherits this tradition. His Marxism, like Nazrul's Islam, is not a theoretical system imposed from outside on a Bengali cultural context but a theoretical framework that grows from and illuminates that context. And his identity as a Muslim Bengali Marxist intellectual is not a collection of separate, potentially contradictory identities that have to be artificially reconciled. It is a specific, historically grounded, intellectually coherent position that is itself a resource for insight.

3.2 Partition, Memory, and the Wound That Does Not Heal

The partition of Bengal in 1947, and the creation of East Pakistan (later Bangladesh), is the single most significant event in the recent history of Bengali culture, and it is impossible to understand the psychology of a Bengali Muslim intellectual without understanding the ways in which partition continues to shape the intellectual landscape within which that intellectual works.

Partition divided Bengal along religious lines, separating predominantly Muslim East Bengal from predominantly Hindu West Bengal. The violence that accompanied partition, the displacement of millions of people, the destruction of communities that had existed for centuries, and the traumatic rupture of a shared cultural life, left wounds in Bengali consciousness that have never fully healed. These wounds are different for different communities. For Hindu Bengalis who migrated from East Bengal, partition is often experienced as a loss of home, a severing from roots that can never be fully recovered. For Muslim Bengalis who remained in West Bengal, partition created a different set of problems: the experience of being a minority in a state where the dominant cultural norms were shaped by the Hindu bhadralok intelligentsia, and where the long shadow of communal violence continued to fall over everyday social relations.

The psychological effects of this inheritance are complex and layered. At one level, there is the direct inheritance of historical trauma: the memories of violence, displacement, and loss that have been transmitted across generations. At another level, there is the structural inheritance of a social position that is defined in important ways by religious minority status. And at yet another level, there is the intellectual inheritance of a set of problems and questions about the relationship between religion, culture, politics, and identity that partition made urgently necessary to address.

For a Bengali Marxist intellectual, the question of communalism, the political mobilization of religious identity for purposes of social division and domination, is not merely an abstract theoretical problem but a lived reality that has shaped the intellectual landscape of Bengal for more than a century. The Marxian critique of communalism, which understands it as a form of false consciousness that divides the working class along religious lines and thereby serves the interests of the dominant classes, has been central to the political culture of the Bengali left since the 1930s. But this critique has also been challenged, refined, and complicated by the recognition that religious identity is not simply a superstructural reflection of economic interests but a complex historical formation with its own logic, its own resources, and its own resistances to purely economic explanations.

Abdul Kafi's scholarly engagement with figures like Nazrul Islam is, at one level, an engagement with this complex problem. Nazrul's Islam was not simply a form of false consciousness

obscuring his real class interests. It was a genuine cultural and spiritual resource that he drew on in the service of his revolutionary political commitments. Understanding Nazrul means understanding how religious tradition can be a resource for political liberation as well as a tool of political oppression, and this understanding requires a more nuanced and historically informed engagement with religion than the simplest versions of Marxian base-superstructure theory can provide.

3.3 The Minority Intellectual and the Problem of Double Consciousness

W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness," developed in "The Souls of Black Folk" in 1903, has become one of the most widely used concepts in the analysis of the psychology of minority intellectuals in contexts of social and cultural domination. Du Bois described the experience of African American life as characterized by a perpetual sense of "two-ness": seeing oneself always through the eyes of others, measuring one's soul by the standards of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. The African American, Du Bois argued, has no true self-consciousness but only a double consciousness, a sense of always looking at oneself through the veil.

The concept of double consciousness has been widely applied and widely debated since Du Bois formulated it. It has been criticized for essentializing and homogenizing the experience of African Americans, for overemphasizing the pathological dimensions of minority experience at the expense of the resources of resistance and creativity that minority culture also generates, and for being more applicable to the experience of educated, middle-class minority intellectuals than to the experience of the working-class majority.

These criticisms are valid and important, but they do not eliminate the usefulness of the concept as a starting point for understanding the specific experience of the minority intellectual in conditions of cultural domination. For a Bengali Muslim academic working in a tradition shaped primarily by Hindu cultural formations, something like double consciousness is a permanent feature of intellectual life. One is always, in some sense, measuring one's intellectual work against standards that were not set primarily with one's own cultural perspective in mind. One is always conscious of belonging to a community whose presence in the dominant academic culture is marked, noticed, and potentially suspect.

This double consciousness is not simply a burden. It can also be a resource. The scholar who must always be aware of the gap between their own perspective and the dominant culture's perspective develops a capacity for critical distance and reflexive self-awareness that scholars formed within the dominant culture often lack. The experience of not quite fitting, of being noticed as different, of having to translate between different cultural logics, develops precisely the intellectual skills of comparative analysis, critical distance, and reflexive self-examination that are most valuable in serious scholarly work.

3.4 Islam, Marxism, and the Problem of Theoretical Synthesis

The relationship between Islam and Marxism is one of the most intellectually fascinating and politically significant theoretical problems of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and it is a

problem that a Bengali Muslim Marxist intellectual like Abdul Kafi cannot avoid, even if he does not address it directly in his published work.

The apparent tension between Islam and Marxism is well known. Islam asserts the existence of God and the transcendent significance of religious revelation, while classical Marxism understands religion as an ideological formation produced by class society and destined to wither away as class society is transcended. Islam asserts the fundamental equality of all human beings before God and the obligations of social solidarity expressed in the institution of zakat and other religious duties, while Marxism insists that genuine equality requires the transformation of economic structures, not merely the fulfillment of religious obligations. These are real tensions, and they have generated genuine intellectual and political conflicts within the history of Muslim-majority societies that have engaged with Marxist ideas.

But the relationship is more complex than a simple opposition. There is a long history of Islamic socialist and Islamic Marxist thought, from the Egyptian thinker Sayyid Qutb's early engagement with social justice questions, through the Iranian Ali Shariati's influential synthesis of Islamic theology and Marxian social analysis, to contemporary liberation theology in Muslim contexts, that demonstrates the possibility of serious intellectual engagement between these two traditions. There is also a significant body of scholarship that traces the structural similarities between Islamic concepts of social justice, economic solidarity, and the critique of usury and exploitation, and Marxian analyses of capitalism and its discontents.

For Bengali Muslim intellectuals, the most relevant precedent is not the global history of Islamic Marxism but the specific Bengali tradition exemplified by Nazrul Islam and his successors. Nazrul's revolutionary Islam was not a systematic synthesis of Islamic theology and Marxian political economy. It was, rather, a practical and poetic engagement with the question of liberation that drew freely on whatever intellectual and cultural resources were available, including both Islamic and Marxian ones, without requiring a prior theoretical reconciliation of their apparent contradictions. This pragmatic, practically oriented synthesis, in which the criterion of adequacy is not theoretical consistency but practical relevance to the struggle for liberation, is characteristic of the Bengali tradition at its best.

Abdul Kafi's scholarship, as we have seen in the preceding parts of this textbook, takes a similar approach. He does not attempt to resolve the theoretical tensions between Islam and Marxism in advance. He engages with the concrete historical reality of Bengali cultural and political life, using whatever theoretical resources best illuminate the specific questions he is addressing. When analyzing Nazrul's revolutionary Islam in Dhumketu, he draws on Marxian concepts of ideology and cultural production without reducing Nazrul's religion to mere ideology. When analyzing the peasant movements addressed in Langol, he draws on Marxian political economy without ignoring the religious and cultural dimensions of peasant consciousness. This is not theoretical inconsistency. It is the practical wisdom of a scholar who understands that intellectual traditions are resources for inquiry rather than dogmas to be applied mechanically.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE EXPERIENCE OF VIOLENCE: THE ASSAULT AND ITS MEANINGS

4.1 The Attack of 2019: Facts and Context

In July 2019, Abdul Kafi was physically assaulted by a former postgraduate student near Gate Number 4 of Jadavpur University. The attacker, identified as Rajesh Santra, had graduated from the Bengali department in 2015 and had, according to reports, been stalking the professor, sending threatening messages, and making previous attempts at confrontation for several months before the actual assault. The attack took place in the afternoon while Kafi was taking tea at a stall outside the university gate. Santra pulled his hair and slapped him, causing him to fall to the ground. Kafi was rescued by bystanders and students, received preliminary medical treatment, and was discharged. Santra was subsequently arrested and charged under sections of the Indian Penal Code relating to wrongful restraint, assault on a public servant, and defamation.

The assault attracted significant media coverage and condemnation from the Jadavpur University Teachers' Association and the university administration. The Vice-Chancellor at the time, Professor Suranjan Das, condemned the incident and promised that such acts would not be tolerated. The Teachers' Association general secretary, Professor Partha Pratim Roy, condemned what he described as an audacious attack by someone who had been stalking the professor for a long time.

Reports suggested that Santra, a resident of Arambagh in Hooghly district, claimed to have grievances related to what he described as discrimination against him by Kafi during his time as a student in the department. Some reports identified him as associated with the RSS, the right-wing Hindu nationalist organization. Others suggested a degree of mental instability. Whether these characterizations are accurate or relevant, they point to a context in which violence against academics in Bengal was not an isolated incident but part of a broader pattern of attacks on university professors and administrators by people with grievances, political affiliations, or personal conflicts that were expressed through physical violence.

4.2 The Pattern of Violence Against Academics in Bengal

The assault on Abdul Kafi was, as press reports at the time noted, not an isolated incident. In the same week, a professor at Hiralal College in Konnagar had been assaulted, and the President of Haldia College had been attacked by workers associated with the Trinamool Congress. In the years preceding 2019, there had been numerous other incidents of violence against academics in West Bengal, reflecting a broader pattern of political polarization, the breakdown of institutional norms, and the increasing willingness to use physical force as a means of resolving intellectual and institutional conflicts.

To understand this pattern, we need to understand something about the specific political history of West Bengal since the late 1970s. The Left Front government, led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), governed West Bengal continuously from 1977 to 2011, a period of thirty-four years. During this period, the CPI(M) developed an extensive system of political control that penetrated every aspect of social and institutional life in the state, including universities. Party

loyalty and party affiliation became significant factors in hiring, promotion, access to resources, and institutional power in universities as in other public institutions.

When the Left Front government was defeated by the Trinamool Congress in 2011, and Mamata Banerjee became Chief Minister, the system of political control was not dismantled but transformed. Trinamool Congress replaced CPI(M) in many positions of institutional influence, and the pattern of party-political penetration of universities continued, albeit now with different beneficiaries. Meanwhile, the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party and its associated organizations, including the RSS and the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), at the national level under Modi's government from 2014 onward, introduced a further dimension of right-wing political pressure on universities that had historically been dominated by the left.

The result of this complex political history is a university environment in which violence, or the threat of violence, is never entirely absent. Academic disputes become political disputes. Professional conflicts acquire party-political dimensions. And individuals who feel aggrieved by academic decisions may seek resolution through extra-institutional means, including physical confrontation, when they perceive institutional channels to be blocked or biased.

4.3 The Psychological Dimensions of Surviving Violence

The psychological literature on the experience of being the victim of violence is extensive and has generated important insights that are relevant to understanding the aftermath of the assault on Abdul Kafi. We should note at the outset that we do not have direct access to Kafi's own account of his psychological experience of the assault and its aftermath. Contemporary press reports indicate that he did not respond to media inquiries at the time. This silence is itself significant and we will return to it.

What does the psychological literature tell us about the experience of being physically attacked? Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can develop following experiences of serious physical threat or harm, is characterized by a cluster of symptoms including re-experiencing of the traumatic event through intrusive memories and nightmares, avoidance of reminders of the event, hyperarousal and heightened vigilance, and negative changes in thinking and mood. Not all people who experience violence develop PTSD, and the likelihood of developing it is influenced by many factors including the severity of the event, the availability of social support, and the individual's prior history and psychological resources.

But even in the absence of clinical PTSD, the experience of being physically attacked in one's professional environment has significant psychological consequences. It disrupts the sense of safety and security that is necessary for intellectual work. It can create a persistent awareness of potential threat that diverts cognitive and emotional resources from productive intellectual activity. It can damage the relationship with the professional environment in ways that make it difficult to maintain the openness and trust that good teaching and research require. And it raises difficult questions about the relationship between intellectual commitment and personal safety, about whether the forms of public intellectual engagement that political commitment demands are compatible with the self-protective imperatives that physical threat generates.

For an intellectual whose work involves taking public positions on contested political and cultural questions, the experience of violence carries an additional dimension. It is not merely the psychological harm of physical attack but the potential silencing effect that such an attack, and the knowledge that such attacks are possible, can have on intellectual expression. This is the most politically significant dimension of the assault: its potential to intimidate, to encourage self-censorship, and to narrow the space within which intellectually and politically challenging ideas can be expressed and defended.

4.4 The Silencing Effect: Intimidation and Intellectual Freedom

The relationship between physical intimidation and intellectual freedom is a subject of great political significance and considerable scholarly analysis. In democratic theory, the protection of intellectual freedom, including freedom of academic inquiry, freedom of teaching, and freedom of scholarly expression, is understood as a fundamental value that justifies significant institutional protections, including academic tenure, university autonomy, and freedom of conscience clauses in employment contracts.

These protections rest on the recognition that intellectual work, particularly intellectually and politically challenging work, is inherently vulnerable to intimidation. The scholar who challenges powerful interests, whose work calls into question established orthodoxies, whose teaching cultivates critical consciousness in students who might otherwise remain comfortably compliant, is always potentially a target. The history of intellectuals is, to a significant extent, a history of persecution: the imprisonment of Gramsci, the exile of Said, the assassination of Lorca, the destruction of Walter Benjamin, the decades-long harassment of Noam Chomsky, and innumerable other cases in which intellectuals have paid serious costs for their intellectual commitments.

The case of Abdul Kafi is less dramatic than these historical precedents, but it belongs to the same pattern. A teacher who is stalked, threatened, and physically attacked by someone associated with a right-wing political organization is a teacher who has been targeted for intimidation. Whether or not the intimidation was politically motivated in a direct and specific way, its effect is to create an environment in which the costs of intellectual and political engagement are raised, and the incentive for caution and self-protection is strengthened.

The response of the academic community to such incidents is therefore politically significant. The condemnation expressed by the Jadavpur University Teachers' Association and the university administration in response to the assault on Kafi was important as a statement that the community would not accept the normalization of violence against academics. But condemnation alone is insufficient. The deeper response required is the cultivation of an institutional culture in which intellectual freedom is actively protected, in which political commitment is understood as a legitimate and valued dimension of academic life, and in which the psychological and social conditions necessary for genuine intellectual work are sustained even under conditions of political pressure.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE LEGAL AND JURISPRUDENTIAL DIMENSIONS OF ACADEMIC LIFE

5.1 The Legal Framework of Academic Freedom in India

The legal framework within which academic freedom is protected and regulated in India is complex, contested, and in important ways inadequate to the demands that a genuinely free intellectual life places on institutions. To understand this framework, we need to examine both the constitutional basis of academic freedom in India and the specific legal and institutional mechanisms through which that freedom is exercised and sometimes curtailed.

The Indian Constitution does not explicitly mention academic freedom, but several constitutional provisions are relevant to its protection. Article 19 guarantees freedom of speech and expression as a fundamental right, subject to "reasonable restrictions" on grounds including public order, decency, and morality, and the interests of national sovereignty. Article 30 guarantees the right of religious and linguistic minorities to establish and administer educational institutions. And the constitutional protection of equality and the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth (Articles 14 and 15) create a framework of formal equality within which academic institutions are required to operate.

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, the Prevention of Atrocities Act, the Right to Education Act, and numerous other pieces of legislation relevant to educational institutions create a complex legal environment that academic administrators and teachers must navigate. More directly relevant to the question of academic freedom is the University Grants Commission's regulatory framework, which establishes minimum standards for university governance, faculty appointments, curriculum design, and research funding.

In practice, the legal protection of academic freedom in India has been consistently less than fully effective. The Indian state has at various times used sedition laws, the Official Secrets Act, and other provisions to restrict or punish academic speech that challenges government policy or dominant ideological orthodoxy. The BJP government's use of sedition charges against student activists and academic critics, including the charges leveled against students at Jawaharlal Nehru University in 2016 following a campus event that attracted accusations of "anti-national" sentiment, has been widely criticized as a threat to academic freedom.

The specific case of the assault on Abdul Kafi was addressed through the ordinary criminal law rather than through any specialized academic freedom framework. The criminal charges brought against his attacker, under sections of the Indian Penal Code relating to wrongful restraint, assault, and defamation, reflect the general criminal law's response to physical violence and harassment. This response is both necessary and insufficient. It is necessary because physical violence against academics must be treated as a criminal matter, with appropriate investigation, prosecution, and punishment. It is insufficient because it does not address the broader political and institutional conditions that enable and encourage such violence.

5.2 Jurisprudential Reflections: Law, Violence, and the Academy

The relationship between law, violence, and the institution of the university has been a subject of significant philosophical and legal-theoretical analysis, and some of this analysis is directly relevant to understanding the situation that Abdul Kafi's case illuminates.

Walter Benjamin's influential essay "Critique of Violence," published in 1921, made a fundamental distinction between what he called "law-preserving" violence, the everyday violence of legal enforcement that sustains the existing social order, and "law-founding" violence, the exceptional violence of revolution that establishes a new legal and social order. Benjamin was deeply suspicious of both forms: law-preserving violence maintains an order that is itself unjust, while law-founding violence, even when it serves just ends, tends to replicate the logic of domination that it claims to overthrow.

Benjamin's analysis raises uncomfortable questions about the role of law in protecting academic freedom. When the law intervenes to punish Santra for his assault on Kafi, it is exercising law-preserving violence: using the coercive power of the state to defend an institutional order, the university as a space of free intellectual inquiry, that is itself embedded within the broader social order of capitalist India. This intervention is both necessary and legitimate: physical violence against teachers must be punished, and the legal system is the appropriate mechanism for doing so. But it also raises questions about the broader social conditions that generate such violence, and whether the law can address those conditions or merely manage their symptoms.

The jurisprudential tradition associated with the law and society movement in India, represented by scholars like Upendra Baxi and Rajeev Dhavan, has insisted on the importance of understanding law not merely as a technical system of rules but as a social practice embedded in relations of power, interest, and ideology. From this perspective, the legal protection of academic freedom is not simply a technical legal question but a political question about the distribution of social power and the relationship between institutional authority and intellectual dissent.

Upendra Baxi, one of India's most significant legal theorists, has argued that the Indian legal system must be understood not only through its formal constitutional and legislative provisions but through its actual operation in the context of an unequal social structure. The formal protections of academic freedom that Indian constitutional and university law provide are real but limited. They protect academics against certain forms of state interference and certain forms of violence. They do not protect academics against the more subtle forms of pressure, intimidation, and marginalization that the political culture of contemporary India generates.

5.3 The Institutional Architecture of Academic Governance

The governance structures of Indian universities, including Jadavpur University, are determined by a complex combination of statutory provisions, UGC regulations, state government policies, and internal institutional rules. Understanding these structures is important for understanding the institutional context within which Abdul Kafi works and within which the conflicts that led to his assault were generated.

Jadavpur University operates under the Jadavpur University Act of 1981, which establishes the basic framework of the university's governance. The university is governed by a Court, an

Executive Council, and a Finance Committee at the institutional level, and by Faculty Councils, Departmental Committees, and various other bodies at the faculty and departmental level. The Vice-Chancellor, who is appointed by the state government, is the principal academic and executive officer of the university. The elected representatives of teaching and non-teaching staff participate in governance through the Academic Council, the Court, and various committees.

This governance structure has several features that are relevant to the question of academic freedom and the protection of intellectuals against violence and intimidation. The significant role of the state government in appointing the Vice-Chancellor and in determining the overall policy environment of the university means that changes in state government can have direct effects on university governance and culture. The political history of West Bengal, with its shifts from Left Front to Trinamool Congress government, and the increasing influence of the BJP at the national level, has meant that the university's governance has been subject to significant political pressures that complicate the maintenance of genuine institutional autonomy.

The role of elected student and faculty bodies in university governance is both a strength and a potential vulnerability. The tradition of democratic participation in governance, which is strong at Jadavpur and reflects the university's founding culture of political resistance and democratic self-organization, creates channels for the expression of genuine institutional interests and for the negotiation of competing claims. But it also creates opportunities for the entry of partisan political interests into institutional decision-making, and for the mobilization of institutional mechanisms in the service of extra-institutional political agendas.

CHAPTER SIX: THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE BENGALI INTELLECTUAL CLASS: BHADRALOK, CASTE, AND INTELLECTUAL HIERARCHY

6.1 The Bhadrlok and Its Discontents

Any serious understanding of the sociology of Bengali intellectual life must engage with the concept of the *bhadralok*, the "respectable people" who have historically constituted the dominant class of Bengali civil society and who have shaped the intellectual and cultural norms of Bengali modernity. The *bhadralok* are not a precisely defined social group in terms of formal criteria, but they can be roughly characterized as the educated, upper-caste, primarily Hindu professional middle class that emerged from the encounter of Bengal with British colonialism and that has dominated Bengali civil society, intellectual life, and cultural production since the nineteenth century.

The *bhadralok* intellectual is a specific social type whose characteristics have been extensively analyzed by historians and sociologists of Bengal. Sumit Sarkar, Partha Chatterjee, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, among others, have produced important analyses of the *bhadralok*'s role in Bengali colonial and postcolonial intellectual life. What these analyses reveal is a class that has been simultaneously the vehicle of a remarkable tradition of intellectual and cultural creativity and the bearer of significant social limitations and exclusions.

The bhadralok's dominance of Bengali intellectual life has been based on several structural advantages: access to colonial education and the cultural capital it conferred; control of certain property and professional occupations; proximity to colonial power structures that provided employment and status; and a cultural tradition that valorized education, intellectual refinement, and aesthetic sensitivity as markers of respectability and social distinction. These advantages are real and have enabled genuine intellectual achievements. But they have also been accompanied by systematic exclusions. The bhadralok intellectual class has historically been predominantly upper-caste and Hindu. Lower-caste communities, Muslim communities, women, and the working class have all been systematically underrepresented in the bhadralok intellectual formation and have had to struggle against the implicit norms of respectability, refinement, and cultural authority that this formation has projected as universal.

6.2 Caste, Class, and the Politics of Academic Inclusion

The question of caste in Bengali intellectual life is one that has historically been understudied and underacknowledged, partly because the left intellectual tradition in Bengal, including the Marxian tradition that Abdul Kafi represents, has tended to subordinate questions of caste to questions of class. The class analysis of exploitation and domination has been seen as more fundamental, and the Marxian tradition has often argued that caste divisions, like religious divisions, are forms of false consciousness that divide the working class and serve the interests of the dominant classes.

This argument has been challenged from several directions in recent decades. The Dalit movement and the intellectual tradition associated with it, drawing on the legacy of B.R. Ambedkar, has insisted that caste is not simply reducible to class and that the specific forms of social degradation and exclusion that caste imposes cannot be adequately analyzed through the Marxian framework alone. Ambedkar's critique of Gandhi's approach to untouchability, and his more fundamental critique of the limitations of both nationalist and socialist approaches to caste, opened up a theoretical space that continues to generate important scholarly and political debates.

At Jadavpur University, the presence of the Centre for Ambedkar Studies alongside the Centre for Marxian Studies reflects an institutional recognition of the importance of both frameworks and, implicitly, of the tensions and potential complementarities between them. Abdul Kafi's coordination of the CMS places him at the center of the Marxian tradition, but his work in the context of a Bengali intellectual culture increasingly attentive to the Ambedkarian critique means that he cannot avoid engaging with the questions that Ambedkar raised, even if his primary intellectual commitments lie within the Marxian tradition.

The question of caste in the Bengali department specifically is also relevant. The history of Bengali literary scholarship has been shaped by the social position of those who produced it, and that social position has been predominantly upper-caste and bhadralok. The texts that have been canonized, the interpretive frameworks that have been developed, the aesthetic standards that have been applied, and the political questions that have been considered important have all been shaped by this social position. A scholarship that seeks to read Bengali literature from a Marxian perspective, attending to the class dimensions of aesthetic form and political content, must also

attend to the caste dimensions of those forms and contents. Kafi's work does not always explicitly address caste, but the tradition within which he works, and the critical tradition that is developing around it, increasingly demands such attention.

6.3 Gender and the Gendering of Intellectual Work

The gendering of intellectual work in Bengali academia is another dimension that must be addressed in any serious account of the sociology of Bengali intellectual life. The Bengali intellectual tradition, like most intellectual traditions, has been predominantly male-dominated. The conditions of intellectual production, access to education, institutional position, and cultural authority have historically been distributed in ways that systematically disadvantaged women. Even figures like Rabindranath Tagore, whose engagement with the question of women's liberation was genuinely significant for his historical context, operated within a cultural framework that defined women's intellectual and artistic contributions as secondary to men's.

The contemporary situation in Bengali academia is more complex. Women are present in significant numbers as students and as faculty members in the humanities departments of Bengali universities, and the feminist movement has produced important scholarship that has challenged and transformed the dominant frameworks of literary analysis. But the structural conditions of academic labor, including the demands of caregiving, the gender dynamics of institutional politics, and the cultural norms that continue to define intellectual authority as primarily male, continue to place women at a systematic disadvantage.

How does this question relate to Abdul Kafi's scholarship and intellectual position? As we noted in Part Six, one of the genuine limitations of Kafi's published work is its limited engagement with feminist theory and with the gender dimensions of the texts he analyzes. The representation of women in *Dhumketu*, *Raktakarobi*, and *Langol* is significant and raises important questions about the gendering of political agency and cultural authority in colonial Bengal. Kafi's analysis does not systematically address these questions, and this gap limits the depth and range of his scholarship.

But the question goes beyond the specific content of his scholarly publications. The broader question is about the gendering of the intellectual tradition that he represents and the extent to which that tradition is capable of developing the theoretical resources necessary to address the gender dimensions of Bengali literary and cultural history adequately. The emergence of feminist scholarship in Bengali studies, represented by figures like Malini Bhattacharya, who has participated in CMS seminars and whose work on gender and Bengali literature has been influential, suggests that the tradition is capable of this development. But it requires a genuine openness to the challenge that feminist theory poses to the framework of class analysis, an openness to the possibility that gender is not merely another variable to be added to the class analysis but a fundamental dimension of social structure that requires the reconstruction of the analytical framework itself.

CHAPTER SEVEN: COMPARATIVE PSYCHOLOGY OF LEFT INTELLECTUALS: GLOBAL AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

7.1 The Intellectual and the Party: A Complex Relationship

One of the most significant and recurring problems in the history of left intellectuals in the twentieth century is the relationship between the intellectual and the political party. The history of communist and socialist parties' relationships with intellectuals is a history of both creative collaboration and profound conflict, of theoretical innovation and political constraint, of genuine solidarity and painful coercion.

The Stalinist period in the Soviet Union, with its doctrine of "socialist realism" and its demand that intellectuals produce art and scholarship in the service of the party's political line, is the most notorious example of the deformation that party control of intellectual life can produce. But the problem is not limited to Stalinism. Even in democratic and parliamentary contexts, the relationship between left parties and left intellectuals has been characterized by tensions between the demands of political discipline and the requirements of genuine intellectual inquiry.

In Bengal, the relationship between the CPI(M)-led Left Front government and the intellectual community was complex and changed significantly over the three and a half decades of Left Front rule. In the early years, there was a genuine sense of solidarity and shared purpose between the left government and the left intelligentsia. The government's policies on land reform, on panchayati raj, and on the expansion of public education were supported by many intellectuals who saw them as genuine advances in the direction of social justice. But as the Left Front government gradually became more entrenched and more bureaucratically conservative, as its initial social democratic impulses were replaced by a pragmatic accommodation to the political and economic constraints of operating within the Indian federal system, and as its treatment of political opponents became increasingly harsh, many intellectuals who had initially supported it became disillusioned.

The turn of many Bengali intellectuals against the CPI(M) in the years leading up to the 2011 election, and the emergence of Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress as the vehicle of popular opposition to the Left Front, was a complex and in some ways tragic event in the history of Bengali intellectual life. Many intellectuals who had been lifelong supporters of the left found themselves voting against a party that still claimed to represent their intellectual and political values, because they found its specific political behavior under the Left Front government to be incompatible with those values. The political disillusionment that this experience generated is a significant feature of the psychological landscape within which Bengali Marxist intellectuals like Abdul Kafi work today.

7.2 The Frankfurt School and the Problem of Critical Theory Under Pressure

The Frankfurt School of critical theory, developed by Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, and others in the 1930s and 1940s, represents one of the most significant attempts to sustain Marxian critical thought under conditions of political catastrophe and intellectual adversity. The Frankfurt School thinkers were all Jewish German

intellectuals who fled Nazi Germany and worked in exile, primarily in the United States, during the darkest years of European fascism. Their theoretical work was produced in conditions of profound political defeat and personal displacement.

What is philosophically significant about the Frankfurt School's response to this situation is not merely the content of their theories but the form of their intellectual practice. Faced with the collapse of the revolutionary movement that had sustained classical Marxism's optimism, with the degeneration of Soviet communism into Stalinist terror, and with the rise of fascism as a mass political phenomenon that classical Marxist theory had failed to predict or adequately analyze, the Frankfurt School thinkers refused both the temptation of political withdrawal, becoming purely "academic" in the pejorative sense of disconnected from political reality, and the temptation of political capitulation, adapting their theoretical work to the demands of the available political parties and movements.

Instead, they developed what Horkheimer called "critical theory": a form of theoretical work that maintained its critical orientation toward the totality of capitalist society while acknowledging the profound difficulties and uncertainties of the historical moment. Critical theory, in this sense, was not a theory that offered clear political prescriptions or confident predictions of liberation. It was a theory that insisted on the importance of critical consciousness even when the immediate prospects for political transformation were bleak, and that understood the maintenance of critical thought as itself a form of political practice.

The relevance of this model to the situation of a Bengali Marxist intellectual in the early twenty-first century is significant. The historical moment in which Abdul Kafi works is not a moment of confident revolutionary advance. It is a moment of significant political difficulty for the Indian left: the decline of the CPI(M), the rise of Hindu nationalism as the dominant political force in India, the deepening of economic inequality and the erosion of social protections under neoliberalism, the weakening of labor movements and the atomization of working-class political organization. In this context, the maintenance of critical Marxian intellectual work, the insistence on the importance of Marxian analysis even when the political movement it serves is in retreat, is itself a form of political practice. It is, in the Frankfortian sense, the refusal of intellectual capitulation to the dominant ideology.

7.3 Gramsci's Organic Intellectual in the Twenty-First Century

Antonio Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual, developed in his Prison Notebooks written between 1929 and 1935 while he was imprisoned by Mussolini's fascist government, remains one of the most powerful and productive concepts for understanding the situation of politically committed academics in the contemporary world.

Gramsci distinguished between "traditional" intellectuals, who present themselves as independent of any particular class and as serving universal values of truth and culture, and "organic" intellectuals, who are organically connected to a particular class and whose intellectual work serves the interests and perspectives of that class. Traditional intellectuals, in Gramsci's analysis, are in reality organically connected to the dominant class, because their apparent independence and universalism is itself a product of the cultural hegemony that the dominant

class maintains. The claim to stand above class interests is itself a class-specific claim, reflecting the perspective of a class secure enough in its cultural dominance to present its particular interests as universal ones.

The organic intellectual of the working class, by contrast, is one who develops and articulates the perspective and interests of the subaltern class, who helps to build the cultural and intellectual infrastructure necessary for the working class to challenge the hegemony of the dominant class, and who does so through genuine intellectual work rather than through simple propaganda or ideological service. For Gramsci, the development of a class of organic intellectuals was one of the most important tasks of political struggle, because hegemony, the cultural and intellectual dimension of class domination, could only be challenged by developing the cultural and intellectual resources of the subaltern classes.

Abdul Kafi's position is best understood in Gramscian terms. He is, in the most meaningful sense, an organic intellectual of the Bengali working class and its allied subaltern classes. His scholarship on the political journalism of Nazrul Islam, the theater of Tagore, and the peasant movement's journal *Langol* is not merely academic research. It is an attempt to recover, analyze, and transmit the intellectual and cultural resources that the Bengali working class and peasantry developed in their struggle against colonial exploitation and capitalist domination. His coordination of the Centre for Marxian Studies is not merely institutional work. It is the building of an intellectual infrastructure that keeps the tradition of Marxian critical thought alive and developing in a moment when that tradition is under significant political and ideological pressure.

The twenty-first century context gives Gramsci's concept new dimensions and new difficulties. The organic intellectual of the contemporary period must operate in a media landscape far more complex than the one Gramsci analyzed, in which the mechanisms of ideological production and reproduction are simultaneously more pervasive and more contested than they were in the 1930s. The organic intellectual must navigate not merely the press and the school but social media, digital platforms, and the new forms of cultural production and distribution that these technologies enable. The question of how Gramscian organic intellectual work can be effective in this new media landscape is one that Kafi's tradition has not yet fully addressed, and it represents one of the most significant challenges for the next generation of Bengali Marxist intellectuals.

7.4 Said, Spivak, and the Postcolonial Intellectual

The postcolonial tradition in intellectual thought offers another set of frameworks for understanding the psychology and politics of the committed intellectual in the formerly colonized world. Edward Said's analysis of the intellectual has already been discussed. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's work offers a different but complementary set of insights.

Spivak, herself a Bengali intellectual who has had a global career in comparative literature and postcolonial theory, has been particularly influential in her analysis of the relationship between the metropolitan intellectual and the subaltern. Her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak," published in 1988, raised fundamental questions about the possibility of genuine representation of subaltern

perspectives within the frameworks of dominant academic discourse. Spivak argued that the subaltern, the most marginalized and dominated subject, cannot speak in ways that are recognized and understood within the dominant intellectual frameworks, because those frameworks are themselves products of the social structures that produce subalternity.

Spivak's analysis has been enormously influential and enormously controversial. Critics have argued that it tends toward an impasse, suggesting that genuine intellectual solidarity with subaltern communities is impossible and that the most one can do is interrupt and problematize one's own intellectual practice without transcending its limitations. Defenders have argued that this critical self-interruption is itself genuinely valuable, that the recognition of the limits of one's position is a precondition for genuine intellectual integrity.

For a scholar like Abdul Kafi, Spivak's analysis raises important questions. His work is, in one sense, an attempt to recover and analyze the voice of subaltern communities, particularly the Bengali peasantry addressed in *Langol* and the urban working class addressed in *Raktakarobi* and *Dhumketu*. The question of whether and how academic scholarship can genuinely represent subaltern perspectives without distorting or domesticating them is one that his practice necessarily raises, even if it is not always explicitly addressed in his published work.

The difference between Spivak's position and Kafi's is significant. Spivak writes primarily for a metropolitan, English-language academic audience and therefore must always confront the question of translation, of the distortion involved in carrying subaltern perspectives into frameworks that were not shaped by or for those perspectives. Kafi writes in Bengali, for a Bengali audience, and within a tradition of Marxian thought that has itself been shaped by the specific history of Bengal's subaltern communities. This does not eliminate the problems that Spivak raises. The Bengali literary scholar is not identical with the Bengali peasant or the Bengali worker, and the academic frameworks through which the scholar analyzes subaltern culture are not transparent to subaltern experience. But the specific form of the problem is different, and the resources available for addressing it are different, in a Bengali-language scholarly tradition than they are in a metropolitan English-language academic context.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE PEDAGOGICAL RELATIONSHIP: TEACHING AS POLITICAL PRACTICE

8.1 The Student-Teacher Relationship in the Bengali Tradition

The relationship between teacher and student has a specific cultural character in the Bengali intellectual tradition that distinguishes it from the more impersonal, contractual models of the teacher-student relationship that have become dominant in neoliberal educational culture. The Bengali tradition of *guru-shishya*, teacher-disciple, carries a weight of obligation, intimacy, and mutual commitment that goes beyond the simple transaction of knowledge for payment.

This tradition is not without its problems. The hierarchical character of the *guru-shishya* relationship can become authoritarian and stifling, suppressing the student's critical

independence in favor of deference to the teacher's authority. The deep personal bonds it can create can also become vectors of exploitation, manipulation, and abuse. The history of Bengali intellectual life includes examples of both the positive and negative dimensions of this relationship.

But at its best, the Bengali tradition of the teacher-student relationship represents a vision of intellectual formation as something more than the transmission of information or the cultivation of marketable skills. It is a vision of the teacher as someone who takes genuine responsibility for the intellectual and personal development of the student, who invests in the student's growth as a thinking person, and who understands the pedagogical relationship as a long-term commitment rather than a merely contractual transaction.

Abdul Kafi's relationship with his students is shaped by this tradition, and it is also complicated by it. As a teacher in a university system that is simultaneously deeply influenced by this tradition and under increasing pressure from the neoliberal model of education as service provision, he navigates a complex set of expectations and obligations. Students come to the Bengali department at Jadavpur with varying expectations: some seek the deep engagement with Bengali literary and intellectual tradition that the department historically offers; others are primarily concerned with professional credentials and career preparation; and still others are politically engaged and see the university as a site of political formation as well as intellectual development.

8.2 Paulo Freire and the Pedagogy of the Oppressed: Applications to the Bengali Context

Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" has been one of the most widely read and influential texts in progressive education globally, but its reception in India and in Bengal specifically has been uneven. The text has been more influential in adult literacy education and community organizing contexts than in formal university education. This is partly because Freire's work was developed in the context of popular education with illiterate and semi-literate communities in Brazil and Chile, and its immediate applicability to university teaching is not always obvious.

But the deeper philosophical dimensions of Freire's pedagogy are highly relevant to the question of how a politically committed university teacher like Abdul Kafi understands and practices his teaching. Freire's fundamental insight, that education is never politically neutral and that the choice is always between an education that reproduces the dominant ideology and an education that develops critical consciousness capable of questioning and transforming that ideology, applies as directly to university teaching in Bengal as to adult literacy education in Brazil.

Freire's concept of "conscientization," the development of critical consciousness through pedagogical engagement with the concrete conditions of one's own social situation, is directly relevant to the kind of teaching that Kafi represents. To read Dhumketu with students from Bengali working-class backgrounds is not merely to transmit knowledge about a historical text. It is to develop in those students a capacity for critical engagement with their own historical situation, a capacity to understand the forces that shape their lives and to imagine the possibility of transforming those forces. This is, in Freire's terms, conscientization: the development of a critical consciousness that is simultaneously an intellectual and a political achievement.

The tension between this Freirean vision of education and the institutional demands of contemporary university education is significant and must be acknowledged. The pressure to prepare students for competitive examinations, to develop credentials that are recognized by employers, and to demonstrate "learning outcomes" in terms that can be measured and assessed according to standardized metrics, is not easily reconcilable with the open-ended, dialogical, conscientization-oriented pedagogy that Freire describes. This tension is a structural feature of the academic life of anyone who takes the political dimensions of teaching seriously, and it is a permanent source of difficulty and compromise.

8.3 The Question of the Difficult Student: Conflict, Authority, and Care

Any honest account of the pedagogical relationship must engage with the reality of difficult students: students who resist, challenge, conflict with, or attack the authority of the teacher. The assault on Abdul Kafi was, in its most immediate and specific form, an act of violence by a former student who claimed to have grievances against his former teacher. This makes it not merely an incident of random violence but a specific kind of pedagogical conflict, one in which the relationship between teacher and student has been distorted and has generated a destructive rather than a constructive response.

The psychology of difficult pedagogical relationships is complex and has been analyzed from several perspectives. From a developmental psychology perspective, the student's relationship with authority figures in educational settings is always complex, involving dimensions of dependence, identification, rebellion, and individuation that have their roots in earlier developmental relationships. The teacher, whether they wish it or not, occupies a position of authority and becomes a screen onto which students project various images and affects derived from their broader life experience.

From a sociological perspective, the conflicts that arise in pedagogical relationships often reflect broader social tensions and inequalities. The experience of being evaluated, assessed, and sometimes found wanting by an institutional authority figure can activate deep anxieties and resentments that have their roots in the broader social inequalities that the institutional system reflects and reproduces. A student from a marginalized background who feels that the educational system does not adequately recognize their capacities or perspectives may experience the judgment of academic assessment as a form of institutional discrimination, and may respond to that perception in ways that are destructive rather than productive.

In the specific case of Kafi's attacker, the claim of "discrimination" that the attacker made to university authorities after his arrest may or may not reflect a genuine experience of unfair treatment. We do not have sufficient information to assess this claim. What we can say is that the experience of academic failure or institutional exclusion can generate powerful negative affects that, in the absence of adequate channels for constructive resolution, can find expression in destructive and violent ways.

8.4 Pedagogy, Care, and the Ethics of the Teacher

The ethical dimensions of teaching are a subject that has attracted increasing attention in educational philosophy and in the broader literature on professional ethics. The "ethic of care," developed in feminist ethics by Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings, offers a particularly relevant framework for thinking about the obligations that teachers have toward their students.

Gilligan's critique of dominant ethical theories, which she argued were based on abstract principles of justice and rights that reflected a specifically masculine moral orientation, proposed an alternative ethic of care focused on the maintenance and nurturing of relationships of mutual responsibility and concern. Noddings developed this into a specific account of the caring relationship in education, arguing that the fundamental obligation of the teacher is to care for the student as a whole person, not merely to transmit knowledge or develop skills.

The ethic of care in education raises difficult questions about the balance between care and standards, between responsiveness to the individual student's needs and the maintenance of institutional norms of evaluation and accountability. A teacher who is genuinely caring is not simply a teacher who gives every student high grades or who avoids difficult assessments. A genuinely caring teacher maintains the standards necessary for the student's genuine intellectual development, even when meeting those standards is challenging and uncomfortable. Care in this sense is compatible with, and in fact requires, the imposition of appropriate demands and the enforcement of appropriate standards.

But the ethic of care also insists that these demands and standards be maintained in a context of genuine concern for the student's wellbeing and development, not in a context of cold institutional judgment or professional indifference. The teacher who cares for students in Noddings's sense sees the student not as a unit in a processing system but as a developing person whose intellectual and personal growth is a matter of genuine ethical concern.

CHAPTER NINE: THE ECONOMICS AND POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

9.1 Intellectual Labor in the Age of Digital Capitalism

The economy of intellectual work has been transformed in fundamental ways by the digital revolution and the rise of what various scholars have called "cognitive capitalism," "informational capitalism," or "knowledge capitalism." These terms refer to the increasing importance of knowledge, information, and cognitive labor as factors of production in the contemporary economy, and to the specific forms of exploitation and accumulation that this shift makes possible.

The implications of this transformation for academic intellectuals are complex and contradictory. On one hand, the digital revolution has created new possibilities for the dissemination of scholarship that bypass the traditional gatekeepers of academic publishing. Open access journals, academic repositories, social media platforms, and digital archives have made it possible for scholars to reach audiences far larger and more diverse than the traditional academic journal

system allowed. A Bengali-language scholar whose work was previously accessible only to readers of Bengali journals can now, through digital platforms, reach a global audience of scholars interested in Bengali literature and culture.

On the other hand, the digital revolution has intensified certain forms of intellectual exploitation. The academic publishing industry, which extracts enormous profits from the intellectual labor of researchers who typically receive no payment for their published work and who depend on their universities to pay the subscription fees necessary to access that work, has been identified as one of the more egregious examples of capitalist appropriation of intellectual commons. The pressure on academics to publish in "high-impact" journals owned by multinational publishers in order to achieve professional recognition and institutional funding reflects the penetration of capitalist market logic into the most fundamental processes of scholarly communication.

For a scholar like Abdul Kafi, who writes in Bengali and publishes with the National Book Agency, a left-wing publisher whose model is explicitly not based on the profit-maximizing logic of multinational academic publishing, the digital revolution offers both opportunities and challenges. The opportunity lies in the possibility of reaching a wider audience for Bengali-language scholarship through digital platforms. The challenge lies in navigating an increasingly digital academic environment that measures scholarly impact in terms that systematically disadvantage Bengali-language work.

9.2 Knowledge as Power: Foucault, Bourdieu, and Academic Hierarchies

The relationship between knowledge and power has been one of the central concerns of social theory in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and two thinkers in particular, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, have produced frameworks that are directly relevant to understanding the political economy of academic knowledge production.

Foucault's concept of "power/knowledge" insisted on the inseparability of knowledge claims from the power relations within which they are produced and through which they operate. For Foucault, knowledge is not a neutral description of an independently existing reality but a practice that is always embedded in social relations of power, that produces and reproduces those relations, and that is incapable of being separated from them. This does not mean that all knowledge claims are equally valid or that the distinction between truth and falsehood is meaningless. It means that the conditions under which knowledge is produced, legitimized, and distributed are always political conditions, and that the analysis of knowledge must attend to the power relations within which it operates.

Foucault's framework is relevant to understanding the politics of academic knowledge in India in several ways. The dominance of English-medium scholarship in the global academy, the prestige hierarchy that places metropolitan universities above postcolonial ones, the disciplinary norms that define certain methods and questions as legitimate and others as marginal or irrelevant: all of these are expressions of knowledge/power relations that have their roots in the history of colonialism and its continuing aftereffects in the global distribution of intellectual authority.

Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of intellectual fields offers a complementary and in some respects more concrete analysis. Bourdieu developed the concept of "academic capital": the specific forms of social and cultural capital, including publications, citations, institutional positions, networks, and reputations, that determine the position of individual scholars and institutions within the academic field. Academic capital is distributed unequally, like other forms of capital, and the struggle for academic capital is a fundamental dynamic of academic life.

Bourdieu's analysis illuminates the specific position of a scholar like Abdul Kafi within the hierarchy of academic fields. His academic capital, measured in the terms that the global academic market uses, is relatively modest. He does not publish in internationally indexed journals. He does not hold a chair at a globally recognized research university. He does not have a large citation count in international databases. By the metrics of the global academic market, he is a minor figure.

But Bourdieu's analysis also reveals the limitations of these metrics. The global academic market's measures of capital are themselves products of a specific power/knowledge structure that systematically advantages certain kinds of scholarship, certain languages, certain institutional positions, and certain geographies over others. The scholar who operates primarily within the Bengali intellectual tradition, who takes seriously the obligations of an organic intellectual to a specific cultural and political community, and who prioritizes depth of engagement with that community over visibility in the global academic market, is not simply less successful by universal standards. They are playing a different game, serving different purposes, and operating according to a different logic of value.

9.3 The National Book Agency and the Political Economy of Left Publishing

The National Book Agency (NBA), with which Abdul Kafi has published his major scholarly book, deserves extended attention as an institution that represents a specific political economy of knowledge production distinct from both the multinational academic publishing industry and the mainstream commercial publishing market.

The NBA was founded in Kolkata in 1939 as a publishing arm of the Indian communist movement. Its founding mission was to make left-wing, progressive, and politically engaged literature and scholarship available to Bengali readers at prices they could afford. The NBA was one of the key institutions of the Bengali communist cultural movement of the mid-twentieth century, publishing not only political texts but literature, poetry, history, and scholarship that was animated by the commitment to social transformation that defined the movement at its best.

The NBA's model was, from the beginning, deliberately counter-commercial. It was not designed to maximize profit but to maximize the distribution of politically important texts to a popular audience. Pricing was kept low, production costs were minimized, and distribution was organized through networks of left-wing bookshops and political organizations that reached communities far beyond the conventional commercial book market. This model was made possible by the organizational infrastructure and financial support of the left political movement, and it has been vulnerable to the decline of that movement since the 1990s.

The decision to publish with the NBA rather than with a commercial publisher or an academic press is a political and cultural statement as well as a professional decision. It situates one's work within the tradition of Bengali left publishing, signals a commitment to making scholarship accessible to a popular audience rather than only to academic specialists, and accepts the consequences of writing for a politically engaged readership rather than merely a professionally interested one. For Kafi, this choice is consistent with his broader intellectual and political commitments. It is part of what it means to be an organic intellectual in the Gramscian sense: to situate one's intellectual work within the cultural and political life of the community one serves, rather than orienting it primarily toward the accumulation of academic capital.

CHAPTER TEN: PHILOSOPHICAL DIMENSIONS OF COMMITMENT: ETHICS, PRAXIS, AND THE GOOD INTELLECTUAL LIFE

10.1 What Is Praxis? The Philosophical Concept and Its Bengali Applications

The concept of praxis, one of the most fundamental in the Marxian philosophical tradition, is directly relevant to understanding the intellectual vocation as it is exemplified by scholars like Abdul Kafi. Praxis, as it was developed by Marx in his critique of Hegel and of the Young Hegelians in the "Theses on Feuerbach," refers to the unity of theory and practice, to the understanding that genuine theoretical insight is not a matter of pure contemplation but of engaged, transformative activity in the world.

The famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it," is perhaps the most frequently quoted and most frequently misunderstood sentence in the Marxian corpus. It has often been read as a dismissal of philosophy and theory in favor of immediate political action. This reading is mistaken. Marx was not arguing that theory is useless. He was arguing that theory that does not issue in practice, that remains at the level of pure contemplation without engaging with the transformative activity of real human beings in the real world, is not adequate to its own aspirations. The "point" of changing the world is not an alternative to interpretation but a criterion of adequacy for interpretation: genuine understanding of the world must be understanding adequate to the possibility of transforming it.

For the academic intellectual, this understanding of praxis raises complex and sometimes uncomfortable questions. How does scholarly work, which takes place primarily within the specialized institutions of academic life, connect to the broader social reality that it claims to analyze and, in some sense, to change? The scholar who publishes a book analyzing the political journalism of Nazrul Islam is engaged in a form of praxis: they are contributing to the cultural and intellectual formation of readers who will, in turn, act in the world on the basis of the consciousness that their reading helps to form. But the connection between this form of intellectual praxis and the more immediate forms of political practice that the Marxian tradition has typically privileged, organizing, strikes, demonstrations, revolutionary action, is mediated by many intermediate steps and by many possible points of disconnection.

The question of how academic praxis can be effective, how it can genuinely contribute to the transformation of social consciousness in ways that make political change possible, is one of the deepest questions that a politically committed academic must face. There are no simple answers. But the question must be honestly confronted, and the honest confrontation of it is itself a form of intellectual integrity.

10.2 The Aristotelian Tradition: Eudaimonia and the Intellectual Life

The Aristotelian tradition in moral philosophy offers a complementary perspective on the question of the good intellectual life that, despite its very different philosophical assumptions, illuminates aspects of the question that the Marxian tradition does not always address with equal clarity.

Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia, often translated as "happiness" or "flourishing," refers not to a subjective state of feeling good but to the objective condition of living and acting well in accordance with one's highest capacities. For Aristotle, the highest human capacity was the capacity for theoretical reason, and the life of contemplation, the *bios theoretikos*, was therefore the most fully excellent and most fully happy human life available.

Aristotle's equation of the best life with the life of theoretical contemplation has been criticized from many directions: for its elitism, for its exclusion of women and slaves from full human excellence, for its valorization of intellectual activity at the expense of practical and political engagement. But the deeper insight behind the Aristotelian position, that human flourishing is connected to the exercise of one's highest distinctive capacities, that a life in which one's genuine powers are expressed and developed is better than a life in which they are suppressed or wasted, remains philosophically important.

For an intellectual like Abdul Kafi, the Aristotelian framework suggests a vision of the good intellectual life as one in which the full range of intellectual capacities, analytical, historical, imaginative, critical, synthetic, pedagogical, political, is brought to bear on genuine intellectual and political problems, in a context of genuine institutional support, intellectual community, and political solidarity. This vision is not fully realized in the actual conditions of academic life in contemporary India, as the preceding chapters have shown. But it serves as a regulative ideal, a standard against which the actual conditions can be measured and through which the demands for better conditions can be articulated.

10.3 Ethics of Intellectual Responsibility: Limits and Obligations

The question of intellectual responsibility, of what obligations the scholar has by virtue of their specific position and capacities, is one of the most contested and most important questions in the philosophy of intellectual life. Different traditions offer different answers.

The liberal tradition, associated with thinkers like Mill and developed in the academic context by figures like the American Association of University Professors in its foundational statements on academic freedom, emphasizes the obligation to truth-seeking and the protection of the conditions under which truth-seeking is possible, including freedom from political interference,

freedom of inquiry, and freedom of publication. On this view, the intellectual's primary obligation is to intellectual honesty and rigor, and political commitments that compromise those qualities are violations of intellectual responsibility.

The Marxian tradition offers a different account. For Gramsci and the tradition of organic intellectual practice, the obligation to truth-seeking is not opposed to political commitment but is expressed through it. The organic intellectual serves the interests of the working class not by distorting truth in the service of political needs but by seeking truth with the specific intellectual and analytical tools that a Marxian framework makes available. Political commitment, properly understood, is not the enemy of intellectual rigor but its condition, because it is only through genuine engagement with the social reality of exploitation and domination that the deepest truths about that reality can be approached.

This Gramscian account is more persuasive than the liberal account in certain respects, but it also requires qualification. The danger of the organic intellectual position is that the commitment to serving a particular class or movement can generate pressures toward ideological conformity and the distortion of analysis in the direction of political convenience. The history of Marxian intellectuals in the twentieth century is full of cases in which genuine intellectual integrity was sacrificed to the demands of political orthodoxy, cases in which the organic intellectual became a party intellectual in the pejorative sense, producing scholarship that served the immediate political needs of the movement rather than the longer-term truth-seeking needs of the working class.

The resolution of this tension, if there is one, lies not in choosing between truth-seeking and political commitment but in understanding political commitment in a way that is compatible with genuine intellectual integrity. The intellectual who is genuinely committed to the liberation of the oppressed is not served by analysis that distorts the truth about their situation. Genuine liberation requires genuine understanding, and genuine understanding requires the kind of rigorous, self-critical, evidence-sensitive inquiry that intellectual integrity demands.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE FUTURE OF THE TRADITION: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES IN 2025 AND BEYOND

11.1 The Current Political Landscape and Its Implications for Bengali Marxist Scholarship

The political landscape within which Abdul Kafi and the tradition he represents must operate in the mid-2020s is in many respects more challenging than it was in the early 2000s when his career began. The rise of Hindu nationalism as the dominant political force in India under the BJP governments of Narendra Modi has created a political environment in which the secular, pluralist, Marxian tradition of Bengali intellectual life is under increasing pressure.

The BJP's political strategy has consistently involved the appropriation and distortion of Indian cultural and intellectual heritage in the service of a Hindu nationalist ideology that is fundamentally incompatible with the secular, pluralist, cosmopolitan traditions of figures like

Tagore, Nazrul, and the Bengali left intelligentsia. The government's interventions in educational institutions, including changes to university governance, curriculum modifications, the appointment of politically sympathetic administrators, and the use of legal mechanisms to suppress academic speech deemed "anti-national," have created a climate of increasing constraint for politically engaged scholarship.

In West Bengal, the political situation is different from the national picture. The Trinamool Congress government of Mamata Banerjee maintains a secular orientation in opposition to the BJP's Hindu nationalism, and Jadavpur University has benefited from a degree of institutional autonomy that some other Indian universities have not enjoyed. But the TC government's own record on academic freedom is not without complications. The pattern of political interference in university governance, which predates the TC and has its roots in the Left Front period, has continued under TC rule.

The specific situation of Jadavpur University in 2025 involves navigating between the pressures of a state government that is not always friendly to institutional autonomy, a national government that is actively hostile to the secular Marxian tradition, and the internal institutional dynamics of a university community that is itself politically divided and in which the traditions of democratic student and faculty participation in governance are both genuinely valuable and genuinely vulnerable to political manipulation.

11.2 The Digital Turn and Bengali Scholarship

The digital revolution has opened new possibilities for Bengali-language scholarship and for the traditions that Abdul Kafi represents. Digital archives of Bengali texts, including many that were previously accessible only in physical libraries and archives, are increasingly available online. Social media platforms, particularly Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp, have become significant channels for the dissemination of scholarly and intellectual content in Bengali. The growth of Bengali online media, including news platforms, cultural journals, and academic websites, has created new outlets for scholarly and critical writing.

These developments offer real opportunities for the expansion of the audience for Bengali Marxian scholarship beyond the traditional readership of printed academic books and journals. The Centre for Marxian Studies, under Kafi's coordination, has engaged with some of these digital possibilities, conducting online seminars during the COVID-19 pandemic period and making some of its lecture series accessible through digital platforms.

The Centre's 2024 online lecture by Gabriel Rockhill, with a response by Himani Bannerji, on "The Imperial Theory Industry and the Compatible Left Intelligentsia," is a good example of how the CMS has been adapting its programming to digital formats while maintaining its commitment to serious theoretical engagement. Rockhill's critique of what he calls the "imperial theory industry," his analysis of the ways in which certain forms of critical theory that appear radical are in fact compatible with and supportive of the structures of capitalist imperialism, is directly relevant to the questions that Kafi's tradition engages. The willingness of the Centre to host such provocative and critical perspectives reflects the intellectual seriousness and the commitment to genuine debate that has always characterized its programming at its best.

11.3 New Voices, New Questions: The Next Generation of Bengali Marxist Scholars

The future of the tradition that Abdul Kafi represents depends critically on the development of the next generation of Bengali Marxist scholars. The Centre for Marxian Studies, the Bengali department, and Jadavpur University more broadly are all sites within which this next generation is being formed. What can we say about the questions and challenges that this next generation will need to address?

First, the relationship between Marxian analysis and the questions of caste, gender, and ecology that have become increasingly central to progressive political and intellectual life in India and globally. The classical Marxian framework, focused on class as the primary axis of social analysis, has been challenged and in important ways enriched by the theoretical traditions associated with Dalit studies, feminist theory, and environmental humanities. The next generation of Bengali Marxist scholars will need to engage seriously with these challenges, developing a richer and more comprehensive framework that can address the full range of social inequalities and environmental crises that constitute the political agenda of the early twenty-first century.

Second, the question of how to engage with the global intellectual landscape without losing the specificity and depth of the Bengali tradition. The pressures of the global academic market to publish in English, to orient research toward questions legible within international disciplinary frameworks, and to adopt the methods and approaches that are prestigious in metropolitan universities are real and increasing. The next generation will need to find ways of engaging with the global intellectual conversation that enrich rather than dissolve the Bengali tradition, bringing the specific resources of that tradition into genuine dialogue with global debates rather than simply translating it into terms that the global academy will recognize.

Third, the challenge of digital media and the new forms of cultural production and political mobilization that digital platforms make possible. The Bengali left intellectual tradition developed its methods and institutional forms in the era of print culture: books, journals, newspapers, and theatrical productions. The digital age requires new forms of intellectual and political engagement, new ways of building and sustaining intellectual communities, and new approaches to the relationship between scholarly analysis and popular political communication.

Fourth, the question of how to sustain the kind of serious, long-term, institutionally supported scholarly work that genuine intellectual progress requires in an environment of increasing financial pressure, institutional instability, and the erosion of the conditions necessary for sustained reflection and research. The neoliberal transformation of higher education threatens the conditions of possibility for serious humanistic scholarship in ways that need to be actively resisted and alternatives actively developed.

11.4 The Relevance of Bengali Marxist Literary Scholarship to Global Debates

The tradition of Bengali Marxian literary scholarship that Abdul Kafi represents has potential contributions to make to global intellectual debates that are not always recognized, partly

because of the language barrier and partly because of the structural position of Bengali scholarship within the global hierarchy of academic prestige.

The most significant of these potential contributions is the tradition's capacity to illuminate the relationship between colonialism, capitalism, literature, and political struggle from a perspective that is rooted in the concrete experience of a society that lived through colonial domination and has been engaged in the struggle for genuine liberation ever since. The specific historical experience of Bengal, with its complex engagement with modernity, its encounter with both British colonialism and American neocolonialism, its development of a distinctive Marxian cultural politics that draws on both the resources of the Bengali literary tradition and the tools of Marxian political economy, generates insights that are not easily available from within metropolitan European or North American intellectual perspectives.

In the current global political conjuncture, in which questions of imperialism, neocolonialism, and the relationship between capitalism and culture are once again urgent in a way that had been partially obscured by the ideological dominance of neoliberalism in the 1990s and 2000s, the Bengali tradition has genuine things to say. The tradition's insistence on the inseparability of cultural analysis from political economy, its refusal of the separation between aesthetic value and political significance, its attention to the specific historical conditions within which cultural production takes place: all of these are contributions to ongoing debates about the relationship between culture, power, and resistance that deserve a wider hearing.

CHAPTER TWELVE: PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE AND INTELLECTUAL INTEGRITY: THE INNER RESOURCES OF THE COMMITTED SCHOLAR

12.1 What Is Psychological Resilience in the Academic Context?

The concept of psychological resilience, developed primarily within clinical and developmental psychology, refers to the capacity to adapt positively to adversity, to maintain or recover functioning in the face of significant stressors or challenges. Resilience research has documented that individuals who face serious adversity do not all respond in the same way: some are overwhelmed and deeply damaged by adversity, while others maintain or even strengthen their functioning in its face. The factors that distinguish resilient from non-resilient responses to adversity are complex and multidimensional, including individual psychological characteristics, social support, cultural resources, and the specific nature of the adversity itself.

In the academic context, resilience is relevant to several dimensions of intellectual life. The resilience needed to sustain intellectual work through conditions of institutional constraint and political pressure is different from but related to the resilience needed to sustain personal functioning through experiences of violence and threat. Both forms of resilience draw on resources that are both individual and social: personal psychological characteristics, including the capacity for meaning-making, the maintenance of a sense of agency, and the ability to find satisfaction in work even under difficult conditions; and social resources, including the support

of intellectual communities, collegial relationships, family and personal networks, and the broader cultural traditions that give one's work its significance.

For Abdul Kafi, the resources of resilience are multiple. The intellectual tradition he works within, with its long history of sustained commitment in the face of adversity, from Gramsci in Mussolini's prisons to the Bengali left intellectuals who maintained their commitments through the periods of political repression and institutional pressure that have characterized West Bengali political history, provides a cultural resource of great psychological significance. The community of scholars and students associated with the Bengali department and the Centre for Marxian Studies provides an immediate social resource. And the work itself, the sustained engagement with texts and ideas that Kafi's scholarship represents, provides the intrinsic satisfactions of intellectual work: the satisfaction of understanding, the pleasure of analysis, the deep engagement with literary and historical material that is, at its best, genuinely absorbing and fulfilling.

12.2 The Role of Intellectual Community in Sustaining Scholarly Work

The importance of intellectual community for the sustaining of scholarly work is often underestimated in accounts of intellectual life that focus on the solitary scholar working in isolation at a library desk or a writing table. The reality of intellectual work is that it is fundamentally social: ideas develop through conversation, through the challenge and response of intellectual debate, through the recognition and criticism of colleagues, and through the shared commitment of a community of inquiry to the pursuit of understanding.

The Centre for Marxian Studies, in this context, is not merely an institutional mechanism for organizing seminars and lectures. It is the primary institutional expression of an intellectual community that provides the social conditions necessary for sustained Marxian scholarly work at Jadavpur. The scholars who have participated in CMS seminars, including figures of the caliber of Prabhat Patnaik, Vivek Chibber, Vijay Prashad, and Himani Bannerji, represent a global network of intellectual solidarity that situates the local Bengali Marxian tradition within a broader community of inquiry.

The significance of this community cannot be overstated. The scholar who works in a community of inquiry, who can share work in progress with colleagues who will engage with it seriously and critically, who can participate in debates that challenge and develop their own thinking, is in a fundamentally better position for sustained intellectual development than the scholar who works in isolation. The CMS provides precisely this kind of community, and Abdul Kafi's coordination of it is therefore not merely an administrative role but a form of intellectual leadership that sustains the conditions of possibility for the scholarly tradition he represents.

12.3 Intellectual Integrity and the Refusal of Compromise

The question of intellectual integrity, of what it means to remain true to one's intellectual commitments under conditions that create powerful incentives for compromise, accommodation, and self-censorship, is one of the deepest questions in the philosophy of intellectual life. The history of intellectuals includes many examples of brilliant and capable scholars who

compromised their intellectual integrity in response to political pressure, institutional incentives, or personal fear. It also includes many examples of scholars who maintained their intellectual commitments at significant personal cost.

The refusal of compromise is not simply a matter of personal courage, though courage is certainly relevant. It is also a matter of intellectual understanding: an understanding that the compromises demanded by institutional pressures and political threats are not merely personally costly but intellectually corrupting, that they distort thought in ways that are not merely inaccurate but fundamentally misconceived.

This understanding is itself a product of the Marxian tradition. The tradition's analysis of ideology, understood as the forms of thought that serve the interests of the dominant class by presenting contingent and exploitative arrangements as natural and inevitable, provides a framework for recognizing the ideological pressures that produce intellectual compromise and for understanding those pressures not merely as personal temptations to be resisted but as structural features of the social organization of knowledge production that must be analyzed and criticized.

The scholar who understands ideological pressure in this way is better equipped to resist it, not because they are necessarily braver than the scholar who does not, but because they understand what is at stake. The compromise of intellectual integrity is not merely a personal failure. It is a contribution to the reproduction of ideological hegemony, a small but real addition to the cultural and intellectual structures that sustain the domination of the oppressed by the powerful. This understanding gives the refusal of compromise a significance that extends beyond the personal and connects it to the broader political project of the intellectual.

12.4 Meaning, Purpose, and the Sustaining of Intellectual Life

The question of meaning is, ultimately, central to any account of the psychology of the committed intellectual. What sustains the commitment to serious intellectual work over a long career, through the periods of political difficulty and personal adversity that inevitably arise? What makes the life of the mind worthwhile in the face of the institutional pressures, the political setbacks, and the personal costs that intellectual commitment entails?

Viktor Frankl, the psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor whose "Man's Search for Meaning" has been one of the most influential texts of the twentieth century on the psychology of meaning, argued that the fundamental human motivation is not pleasure or power but meaning: the sense that one's life and one's suffering are oriented toward something significant. Frankl developed his theory from the extremity of the Nazi concentration camp, an experience that subjected his claims to the most severe possible test. His conclusion, that even in conditions of extreme suffering and deprivation the capacity for meaning-making is the last human freedom and the fundamental source of psychological resilience, is both philosophically compelling and practically significant.

For Abdul Kafi and for intellectuals working in the tradition he represents, the sources of meaning are multiple and mutually reinforcing. There is the intellectual meaning of genuine

inquiry: the sustained engagement with important questions about history, culture, politics, and the human condition that serious scholarship provides. There is the pedagogical meaning of teaching: the sustained relationship with students whose intellectual development is a form of genuine human investment that yields real, if often invisible, fruits. There is the political meaning of organic intellectual work: the sense of contributing, however modestly and mediately, to the broader project of human liberation that the Marxian tradition has always kept in view. And there is the cultural meaning of working within a living intellectual tradition: the sense of being part of a conversation that extends backward in time through Gramsci and Marx and Tagore and Nazrul and forward in time through the students one teaches and the scholars one inspires.

These sources of meaning are not guaranteed. They can be threatened by institutional pressure, political defeat, personal adversity, and the sheer weight of circumstance. But they are available, and the sustained capacity to draw on them in the face of adversity is what makes the life of the committed intellectual, at its best, a life that is genuinely good: not merely strategically advantageous, not merely professionally rewarding, but genuinely and deeply meaningful in a way that sustains and justifies the commitment it demands.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS TO PART SEVEN: THE INNER LIFE AND THE OUTER WORLD

The twelve chapters of this Part have explored the psychological, philosophical, sociological, legal, economic, and comparative dimensions of the intellectual life as it is exemplified by Abdul Kafi and the tradition he represents. We have moved through a range of questions: the concept of vocation and its philosophical foundations; the political economy of academic life in contemporary India; the intersecting dimensions of identity, religion, and intellectual practice; the experience of violence and its psychological and political significance; the legal framework of academic freedom and its limitations; the sociology of the Bengali intellectual class and its complex dynamics of inclusion and exclusion; the comparative psychology of left intellectuals in different historical and national contexts; the pedagogical dimensions of political commitment; the economics and politics of knowledge production; the philosophical foundations of praxis, ethics, and intellectual integrity; and the challenges and possibilities facing the tradition as it enters a new phase of its development.

What emerges from this sustained engagement is not a simple portrait but a complex one. Abdul Kafi is a scholar who works at the intersection of multiple pressures, multiple identities, multiple intellectual traditions, and multiple institutional demands. He is shaped by the specific history of Bengali intellectual life and by the global tradition of Marxian thought. He works within an institution, Jadavpur University, that has genuine strengths and genuine vulnerabilities. He navigates a political environment that is simultaneously inspiring in the depth and creativity of the intellectual tradition it has produced and challenging in the specific political and institutional pressures it currently generates.

The inner life of a politically committed intellectual is not easily accessible to external analysis. We do not have direct access to Abdul Kafi's own account of his intellectual experience, his motivations, his doubts, his satisfactions, and his disappointments. What we have is the external evidence of his institutional position, his scholarly work, his organizational activities, and the historical record of the incidents and circumstances that have shaped his career. From this external evidence, we have attempted to reconstruct something of the inner life that such a career both requires and produces.

What that reconstruction suggests is a life that is genuinely significant: significant not merely in the narrow sense of professional achievement but in the deeper sense of being genuinely engaged with questions that matter, genuinely committed to a tradition and a community and a political project that extend beyond the individual, and genuinely capable of finding meaning in that engagement even under conditions of adversity and constraint. The committed intellectual, at their best, is someone who has found a way of living that is both intellectually honest and politically engaged, that refuses both the cynicism of pure self-interest and the self-deception of false certainty, and that sustains the difficult, necessary work of critical inquiry in the face of all the forces that conspire to make such inquiry inconvenient, uncomfortable, or dangerous.

This is the inner life that the outer work of scholars like Abdul Kafi requires and, in its best moments, expresses. It is an inner life that is worth understanding, worth admiring, and worth learning from, whatever one's own intellectual commitments and political positions may be.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Examine the concept of intellectual vocation as developed by Max Weber in "The Vocation of Science" and "The Vocation of Politics." How do Weber's accounts of the specific demands and tensions of these vocations apply to the situation of an academic intellectual who seeks to combine rigorous scholarship with political commitment? What specific tensions does Weber identify, and how adequate are his proposed resolutions?
2. Analyze the concept of "double consciousness" as developed by W.E.B. Du Bois and consider its applicability to the situation of a Bengali Muslim intellectual working within a tradition shaped primarily by Hindu *bhadralok* cultural formations. What specific forms does double consciousness take in this context, and what resources does the tradition provide for addressing or transcending it?
3. Evaluate the relevance of Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual to the situation of an academic intellectual in a contemporary Indian university. What specific features of contemporary Indian academic life modify or complicate the application of this concept, and how might it be adapted to better capture the specific dynamics of intellectual work in the early twenty-first century?
4. Analyze the psychological dimensions of the experience of violence in the academic context. Drawing on the psychological literature on trauma, resilience, and post-traumatic growth, analyze the potential long-term effects of the 2019 assault on Abdul Kafi's intellectual and personal life. What institutional and social supports would be most important for facilitating resilient responses to such experiences?

5. Examine the legal framework of academic freedom in India through the lens of constitutional law, UGC regulations, and the specific governance structures of Jadavpur University. Identify the most significant gaps between the formal protections provided by this legal framework and the actual conditions of academic freedom in contemporary Indian universities. What legal and institutional reforms would be most important for strengthening these protections?
6. Compare the political economy of Bengali-language academic publishing, as represented by the National Book Agency, with the political economy of English-language academic publishing as represented by major multinational academic publishers. What are the specific advantages and disadvantages of each model for the intellectual goals of a politically committed Marxian scholar? What alternative models are available, and what would be their advantages?
7. Analyze Freire's concept of conscientization in relation to the specific challenges of university teaching in contemporary India. What specific pedagogical practices most effectively promote the development of critical consciousness in undergraduate and postgraduate students of Bengali literature and culture? What are the most significant obstacles to such practices in the current institutional environment?
8. Evaluate the argument that the Bengali Marxian literary scholarship represented by Abdul Kafi has significant contributions to make to global intellectual debates about the relationship between culture, capitalism, and resistance. What specific insights does this tradition offer that are not easily available from within metropolitan European or North American intellectual perspectives? What are the most important barriers to the wider recognition of these contributions?
9. Consider the ethics of intellectual commitment in relation to the concept of praxis as developed by Marx in the "Theses on Feuerbach" and developed by later Marxian thinkers including Gramsci, Lukacs, and the Frankfurt School. What specific ethical obligations does the concept of praxis impose on the committed intellectual? How are these obligations in tension with other ethical obligations, including obligations to truth, to institutional accountability, and to personal wellbeing?
10. Analyze the relationship between intellectual resilience and intellectual community, drawing on the sociology of science and knowledge, the philosophy of intellectual life, and the specific history of the Centre for Marxian Studies as an intellectual community. What specific features of the CMS's history and functioning have been most important for sustaining the intellectual work of its participants under conditions of political and institutional adversity?
11. Examine the gendering of intellectual authority in the Bengali literary tradition, from the nineteenth century to the present. What specific mechanisms have produced and reproduced the dominance of male scholars and the marginalization of women's intellectual contributions? What changes in institutional practice, curriculum design, and scholarly method would be most important for genuinely transforming these dynamics?
12. Develop a sustained comparison between the situation of Abdul Kafi at Jadavpur University and the situation of a comparable Marxian literary scholar at a major university in either China, Brazil, or South Africa. What are the most significant similarities and differences in their institutional contexts, political pressures, and intellectual opportunities? What does the comparison reveal about the specific features of the Indian academic context?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

On the philosophy of intellectual vocation: Max Weber's "The Vocation of Science" and "The Vocation of Politics," both available in various collected editions of his work, provide the classical account. Edward Said's "Representations of the Intellectual" provides the most important late twentieth-century rethinking. Bruce Robbins's "Secular Vocations: Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture" offers a valuable critical perspective.

On the psychology of political commitment and resilience: James Pennebaker's "Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions" provides important psychological research on the processing of difficult experiences. Viktor Frankl's "Man's Search for Meaning" offers the most compelling philosophical-psychological account of meaning-making under conditions of extreme adversity. Judith Herman's "Trauma and Recovery" provides the most important clinical account of the psychology of trauma and its aftermath.

On the sociology of Bengali intellectual life: Sumit Sarkar's "The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal" and his collected essays in "Writing Social History" provide essential historical context. Partha Chatterjee's "The Nation and Its Fragments" and "A Princely Impostor" offer the most important theoretical accounts of Bengali nationalism and its intellectual formations. Dipesh Chakrabarty's "Provincializing Europe" provides the most influential postcolonial engagement with Bengali intellectual history.

On the political economy of academic life: Andrew Ross's "No-Collar: The Humane Workplace and Its Hidden Costs" and David Graeber's "Bullshit Jobs" provide important accounts of the transformation of intellectual labor under neoliberalism. Stefan Collini's "What Are Universities For?" provides the most sustained defense of humanistic scholarship against the demands of the neoliberal university. Gary Hall's "The Uberfication of the University" offers a more recent critical analysis.

On Paulo Freire and critical pedagogy: Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" is essential. Henry Giroux's "Theory and Resistance in Education" provides the most important American development of Freirean ideas. bell hooks's "Teaching to Transgress" offers a feminist and anti-racist engagement with the Freirean tradition.

On the Frankfurt School and critical theory: Martin Jay's "The Dialectical Imagination" provides the standard historical account of the Frankfurt School. Rolf Wiggershaus's "The Frankfurt School" provides a more comprehensive historical and analytical treatment. Stuart Jeffries's "Grand Hotel Abyss: The Lives of the Frankfurt School" provides a more accessible and narrative treatment.

On Gramsci and the organic intellectual: Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith's translation of "Selections from the Prison Notebooks" remains the essential English-language text. Walter Adamson's "Hegemony and Revolution: A Study of Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Theory" provides an important scholarly introduction. Perry Anderson's essay "The Antinomies

of Antonio Gramsci" in the New Left Review provides the most rigorous critical assessment of the concept of hegemony.

On law, academia, and intellectual freedom: Upendra Baxi's "The Future of Human Rights" and his collected essays provide the most important Indian jurisprudential perspective. Rajeev Dhavan's "Publish and Be Damned: Censorship and Intolerance in India" provides essential context for understanding the legal dimensions of intellectual freedom in India. Henry Reichman's "The Future of Academic Freedom" provides a comparative perspective.

On the National Book Agency and left publishing in India: Ravi Kant's work on the history of left cultural organizations in Bengal provides essential context. Sumanta Banerjee's various writings on Bengali popular culture and its political dimensions are also relevant. The archives of the National Book Agency itself, housed in Kolkata, provide primary source material for scholars with access to them.

APPENDIX TO PART SEVEN: A PHILOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY OF KEY CONCEPTS

The following glossary provides brief definitions and contextual explanations of key philosophical, sociological, and psychological concepts used in Part Seven. It is intended as a reference tool for students who encounter these concepts for the first time and wish to understand their technical meanings and intellectual histories.

ACADEMIC CAPITAL: A term derived from Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of intellectual fields. Refers to the specific forms of cultural and social capital that determine an individual scholar's or institution's position within the academic hierarchy. Academic capital includes publications, citations, institutional positions, peer recognition, grant funding, professional networks, and other forms of symbolic and material resource relevant to academic status.

ALIENATION: In Marxian philosophy, the condition of the laborer in capitalist production, in which their labor is appropriated by capital and becomes alien to them, experienced as an external, hostile power rather than as an expression of their own human capacities. Marx distinguished alienation from the labor process itself, from the product of labor, from other workers, and from one's own species-being.

BHADRALOK: A Bengali term, literally "respectable people," referring to the educated upper-middle class that has dominated Bengali civil society and intellectual life since the nineteenth century. The bhadralok are predominantly upper-caste and Hindu and have played a defining role in shaping Bengali modernity, nationalism, and cultural production.

CONSCIENTIZATION: A term developed by Paulo Freire to describe the process of developing critical consciousness through pedagogical engagement with the concrete conditions of one's own social situation. Conscientization is not merely intellectual understanding but a practical, transformative form of awareness that is a precondition for emancipatory political action.

DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS: A concept developed by W.E.B. Du Bois in "The Souls of Black Folk" to describe the experience of African Americans as seeing themselves always through the eyes of a dominant society that regards them with contempt, leading to a divided sense of self between one's own self-perception and the dominant society's perception.

EUDAIMONIA: An Aristotelian concept, often translated as "happiness" or "flourishing," referring to the objective condition of living and acting well in accordance with one's highest human capacities. Eudaimonia is not a subjective feeling but an objective assessment of the quality of a life.

HEGEMONY: A concept developed by Antonio Gramsci to describe the cultural and intellectual dimension of class domination. Hegemony refers to the process by which the dominant class secures the consent of the dominated to the social order, not through direct coercion but through the shaping of common sense, cultural values, and intellectual frameworks in ways that naturalize and legitimize the dominant order.

KNOWLEDGE/POWER: A concept developed by Michel Foucault to describe the inseparability of knowledge claims from the power relations within which they are produced and through which they operate. Knowledge is not a neutral description of reality but a practice embedded in social relations of power that produces and reproduces those relations.

ORGANIC INTELLECTUAL: A concept developed by Antonio Gramsci to describe the intellectual who is organically connected to a particular class and whose intellectual work serves the interests and perspectives of that class. Contrasted with the "traditional intellectual," who presents themselves as class-neutral but is in fact organically connected to the dominant class.

PRAXIS: In Marxian philosophy, the unity of theory and practice, the understanding that genuine theoretical insight is not a matter of pure contemplation but of engaged, transformative activity in the world. Derived from Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach."

RESILIENCE: In psychology, the capacity to adapt positively to adversity, to maintain or recover functioning in the face of significant stressors or challenges. Resilience is understood not as a fixed trait but as a dynamic process shaped by individual psychological characteristics, social support, cultural resources, and the specific nature of the adversity faced.

SUBALTERN: A term used in postcolonial theory, particularly in the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and the Subaltern Studies collective, to describe the most marginalized and dominated subjects of colonial and postcolonial social formations. The question of whether and how subaltern perspectives can be represented within the frameworks of dominant academic discourse is one of the central debates in postcolonial theory.

VOCATION: Derived from the Latin *vocare*, to call. In its theological sense, a calling from God to a particular life-path. In the secularized sense developed through Weber's analysis of the Protestant ethic, the concept of work as carrying a significance and obligation beyond mere economic calculation. In the context of intellectual life, the sense of being called to a life of the mind and of bearing the obligations that such a calling entails.

Part Eight of this textbook will address: The Comparative Dimension, Situating Bengali Marxian Literary Scholarship within World Literature and World Marxism: Connections, Contrasts, and Critical Encounters.

End of Part Seven

A NOTE ON SOURCES AND METHOD

Part Seven draws on a wide range of primary and secondary sources in several disciplines. The philosophical sources include Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach" and "The German Ideology," Gramsci's "Prison Notebooks," Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics," Weber's "The Vocation of Science" and "The Vocation of Politics," Foucault's "Discipline and Punish" and "The Archaeology of Knowledge," Bourdieu's "Distinction" and "The Field of Cultural Production," Said's "Representations of the Intellectual," Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak," Du Bois's "The Souls of Black Folk," and Benjamin's "Critique of Violence."

The sociological and historical sources include Sumit Sarkar's work on Bengal and Marxian historiography, Partha Chatterjee's work on Indian nationalism and postcolonial politics, Dipesh Chakrabarty's "Provincializing Europe," Upendra Baxi's work on Indian law and human rights, and various institutional sources including the official websites of Jadavpur University and the Centre for Marxian Studies.

The psychological sources include Viktor Frankl's "Man's Search for Meaning," Judith Herman's "Trauma and Recovery," Carol Gilligan's "In a Different Voice," and Nel Noddings's "Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education."

Where specific claims are made about events in Abdul Kafi's life and career, the sources are primarily the contemporary press reports available in Indian news media, the institutional websites of Jadavpur University and the Centre for Marxian Studies, and the broader scholarly literature on Bengali intellectual history. The analysis and interpretation are those of the textbook's authors and do not claim to represent Abdul Kafi's own views, which remain largely unknown to us in the absence of direct access to his own writing about his intellectual life and self-understanding.

PART EIGHT: THE COMPARATIVE DIMENSION: SITUATING BENGALI MARXIAN LITERARY SCHOLARSHIP WITHIN WORLD LITERATURE AND WORLD MARXISM

PREFACE TO PART EIGHT

Part Seven of this textbook explored the psychological, philosophical, sociological, and legal dimensions of intellectual life as it is exemplified by Abdul Kafi, examining the inner world of the politically committed scholar and the complex interplay between personal identity, institutional position, political commitment, and intellectual practice. We moved through questions of vocation, resilience, identity, trauma, jurisprudence, and pedagogical ethics in an attempt to understand not merely what Kafi has argued but what it means to be the kind of person who argues those things in those conditions.

Part Eight turns outward and upward. It asks: within which larger intellectual worlds does Abdul Kafi's work sit? What conversations, both within the long history of Marxian thought and within the emerging frameworks of world literature studies, does his Bengali Marxian literary scholarship enter into, whether explicitly or implicitly? What does his work look like when placed beside the comparable intellectual projects of Marxian literary scholars in Latin America, China, sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab world, and the metropolitan West? And what do the distinctive features of the Bengali tradition, its specific historical formation, its particular theoretical emphases, its characteristic methodological choices, contribute to these global conversations and what does it receive from them?

These are comparative questions, and they require comparative methods. The comparative approach in literary and cultural studies has a long and contested history. The discipline of comparative literature was established in European universities in the nineteenth century on the basis of assumptions, about the primacy of European literary traditions, about the centrality of national literary canons, about the universalizability of certain aesthetic standards developed in specific historical and cultural contexts, that have been fundamentally challenged by postcolonial theory, world literature studies, and the theoretical rethinking of comparison itself in the past three decades. The emergence of "world literature" as a contested concept and a programmatic framework, from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's brief and suggestive coinage of the term *Weltliteratur* in 1827, through the systematic proposals of Franco Moretti, Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in the 1990s and 2000s, to the ongoing debates of the 2020s about what world literature means in an age of digital circulation and deepening global inequality, has both enriched and complicated the task of situating any specific literary tradition within the global framework.

Part Eight engages seriously with these debates and frameworks, because they are directly relevant to the question of how to understand Abdul Kafi's work in its comparative and global dimensions. But it also maintains a critical distance from the dominant frameworks of world literature studies, because those frameworks, as Spivak, Aamir Mufti, and others have persuasively argued, tend to reproduce rather than challenge the hierarchies of the global literary market and the cultural imperialism embedded in the metropolitan academy's power to define what counts as world literary significance.

The chapters of Part Eight address the following areas: the history and theory of world literature and its relevance to the Bengali tradition; the comparative history of Marxian literary theory and criticism and the specific contribution of the Bengali tradition within that history; the

relationship between Bengali Marxian scholarship and the traditions of Latin American, African, and Arab Marxian literary thought; the question of translation and its politics in the circulation of Bengali literary scholarship within global intellectual networks; the comparative analysis of specific theoretical frameworks, including the theory of realism, the theory of the political unconscious, and the theory of cultural hegemony, as they have been deployed in the Bengali tradition and in other national Marxian literary traditions; the specific question of how Bengal's literary and intellectual tradition relates to the Chinese Marxian literary tradition, given the particular historical significance of China in Asian Marxism; the problem of imperialism and world-systems theory and its relevance for understanding the global position of Bengali literary culture; the relationship between the Bengali tradition and contemporary debates in ecocriticism, digital humanities, and comparative media studies; the specific question of how Tagore's and Nazrul's global receptions have shaped the international perception of Bengali literary culture and what that perception conceals as well as reveals; and the future of comparative Bengali studies in an age of digital globalization.

CHAPTER ONE: WORLD LITERATURE AND ITS DISCONTENTS: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND THEIR LIMITATIONS

1.1 Goethe's *Weltliteratur* and Its Twentieth-Century Heirs

When Goethe coined the term *Weltliteratur* in conversations recorded in 1827, he was responding to his own reading of a Chinese novel and reflecting on the growing circulation of literary works across national and linguistic boundaries that was already accelerating through the mechanisms of the early nineteenth-century book trade. His observation, that national literature no longer meant very much and that the epoch of world literature was approaching, was prescient in ways he could not have fully anticipated. The globalization of literary culture has accelerated so dramatically since Goethe's time that the idea of a single world literary field, however contested its specific contours may be, is no longer merely a romantic aspiration but a structural reality of the global book market and the global academy.

But Goethe's observation was also, as subsequent scholars have pointed out, profoundly Eurocentric in its underlying assumptions. When Goethe spoke of world literature, he was thinking primarily of European literature and its circulation, with non-European texts functioning as stimulating imports rather than as equal participants in a genuinely shared global literary conversation. The Chinese novel he read, to which he responded with such enthusiasm, was interesting to him partly because of its strangeness, its difference from European literary norms. His world literature was a world whose center was European and whose non-European peripheries contributed exotic material to an essentially European conversation.

This Eurocentrism was reproduced and intensified in the institutionalization of comparative literature as a university discipline in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The major theoretical statements of comparative literature's founding generation, from Fernand Baldensperger and Paul Hazard in France to Ernst Curtius in Germany, assumed European literary traditions as the primary object of study and European aesthetic standards as the

measures of literary value. Non-European literary traditions were included, if at all, primarily as background or context for understanding European literary development, not as independent objects of analysis with their own internal logic and their own claims to world literary significance.

The critique of this Eurocentrism, which has been one of the central intellectual projects of postcolonial theory and the rethinking of comparative literature since the 1970s, is fundamental to any serious engagement with the question of how Bengali literary culture relates to the concept of world literature. The Bengali tradition cannot be adequately understood within the framework of a world literature that has European literature at its center and treats all other literary traditions as peripheral variations on European themes. Nor can it be adequately understood within the framework of a world literature that values non-European traditions primarily for their difference from European norms, treating them as exotic contributions to a global diversity that is itself implicitly defined in European terms.

1.2 Pascale Casanova and the World Republic of Letters

Pascale Casanova's "The World Republic of Letters," published in French in 1999 and in English translation in 2004, offered one of the most systematic and influential attempts to theorize the structure of the global literary field and the mechanisms through which literary prestige and recognition are distributed within it. Casanova's framework, drawing on Bourdieu's sociology of cultural fields, described the global literary field as a hierarchically structured space in which different national literary traditions occupy positions determined by their accumulated "literary capital": the prestige, the critical recognition, the network of translations and adaptations, and the historical depth of tradition that characterize them.

Within this framework, the central position in the global literary field is occupied by Paris, which Casanova described as the "Greenwich meridian" of world literature: the place where literary value is determined and from which it radiates outward to the periphery. Other major literary centers, including London, New York, and Frankfurt, compete for position within this hierarchy, while the literatures of the formerly colonized world occupy peripheral positions from which they can access the global literary field primarily through the gatekeeping function of metropolitan publishers, translators, and critics.

Casanova's framework has been enormously influential and enormously controversial. Its strengths lie in its systematic attention to the institutional and economic mechanisms through which literary prestige is distributed and its refusal to treat the global literary hierarchy as a simple reflection of aesthetic value. Its weaknesses lie in its Eurocentrism, its tendency to treat the French literary tradition as uniquely central to the global literary field, and its relative inattention to the multiple alternative centers of literary authority that exist outside the metropolitan nexus and that operate according to different logics of value.

For Bengali literary culture, Casanova's framework is instructive but limited. The Bengali literary tradition has accumulated genuine literary capital over two centuries of intense literary and intellectual development, including the extraordinary achievement of Tagore's Nobel Prize in 1913, which was the first Nobel Prize in Literature awarded to a non-European writer and

remains one of the most significant moments in the global recognition of South Asian literary culture. But the mechanisms by which Bengali literary culture is recognized within the global literary field are deeply shaped by the mediation of metropolitan institutions, publishers, and translators, and the forms of Bengali literary culture that are most recognized globally are often those that are most legible within the frameworks of European literary aesthetics.

The Bengali Marxian literary tradition that Abdul Kafi represents is, within Casanova's framework, a particularly marginal tradition within an already peripheral literary culture. Not only is it non-European, but it is written in a vernacular language that lacks the global reach of Hindi or Urdu, let alone of English, French, or Spanish. It is politically committed in ways that make it less attractive to the global literary market's preference for literature that is aesthetically sophisticated but politically ambiguous. And it is primarily concerned with questions specific to the history of Bengal and South Asia, rather than with questions of supposedly universal human significance.

All of this makes the Bengali Marxian tradition invisible within the structures that Casanova analyzes. But this invisibility is not a measure of the tradition's intellectual significance. It is a measure of the limitations of the frameworks through which the global literary field distributes recognition and prestige.

1.3 Franco Moretti and Distant Reading: The Problem of Scale

Franco Moretti's essays on world literature, particularly his 2000 essay "Conjectures on World Literature" and his subsequent book "Distant Reading," proposed a methodological program for world literary studies that was both ambitious and controversial. Moretti argued that the sheer scale of world literary production made the traditional method of close reading, in which the scholar reads every text in their purview with sustained interpretive attention, simply inadequate to the task of understanding world literature as a whole. In its place, he proposed "distant reading": the use of quantitative methods, data analysis, and large-scale comparative frameworks to identify the structural patterns of world literary history without engaging in detail with any particular text.

Moretti's proposals generated intense debate, much of it critical. The most important line of criticism, developed by scholars including Gayatri Spivak, Benita Parry, and Aijaz Ahmad, argued that distant reading, in its dependence on texts already translated into European languages and already recognized within the global literary market, systematically excluded the vast majority of world literary production from its purview. A world literature that was assembled from translated texts available in major European university libraries was not world literature but European literature plus whatever non-European literature European publishers and translators had found interesting enough to translate. The political economy of translation, which reproduces the hierarchies of the global literary market rather than reflecting the actual distribution of literary significance in the world, was not a problem that quantitative methods could solve.

For our purposes, Moretti's framework is useful primarily as a foil. The specific tradition of Bengali Marxian literary scholarship that Kafi represents is precisely the kind of tradition that distant reading cannot engage with. It is written in Bengali, which means it is not available

within the databases of translated texts on which distant reading methods depend. It is concerned with specific historical texts and specific historical questions that resist the kind of large-scale structural analysis that Moretti proposes. And its value lies precisely in the depth of engagement with specific texts, specific contexts, and specific political questions that close reading enables and that distant reading by definition sacrifices.

The contrast with Moretti helps to clarify what is most distinctive and most valuable about the close reading, historically informed, politically engaged methodology that Kafi's scholarship employs. It is not a methodology that can be scaled up to cover the entire world literary field, but that is not its purpose. Its purpose is to illuminate specific texts in specific historical and political contexts in ways that are both intellectually rigorous and politically significant, and in that purpose it succeeds in ways that no amount of quantitative analysis of large literary datasets can replicate.

1.4 David Damrosch and the Circulation of World Literature

David Damrosch's "What Is World Literature," published in 2003, offered a more pragmatic and institutionally attentive account of world literature than either Casanova or Moretti. For Damrosch, world literature was not a fixed canon of great works but a mode of reading: texts function as world literature when they circulate beyond their originating culture and are read in translation by readers in different cultural contexts. World literature is, on this account, primarily a function of circulation and reception rather than of intrinsic aesthetic quality.

This definition has the advantage of being genuinely pluralistic and institutionally flexible. It allows any text that successfully circulates beyond its original linguistic and cultural context to be counted as world literature, without imposing European aesthetic standards as the criterion of literary value. But it also has significant limitations. It tends to privilege texts that are translatable, in the sense of being accessible to readers in different cultural contexts without requiring deep knowledge of the originating culture, over texts that are deeply embedded in specific cultural and historical contexts and that therefore resist easy translation. And it tends to privilege texts that are attractive to the global literary market over texts that are politically challenging or that address questions specific to particular social struggles.

For the Bengali Marxian tradition, Damrosch's framework is more hospitable than Moretti's or Casanova's, but it still has limitations. Tagore circulates globally as world literature in Damrosch's sense, and his global circulation has made Bengali literary culture visible in ways that it would not otherwise be. But the specific dimension of Tagore's work that is most globally circulated, his lyric poetry and his essays on universal spiritual and cultural themes, is not the dimension that is most relevant to the Bengali Marxian tradition. The politically engaged Tagore, the author of *Raktakarobi* and other plays that engage with the dehumanization of industrial capitalism, is much less globally visible than the lyrical Tagore of *Gitanjali*, precisely because the politically engaged Tagore is more specifically embedded in the history of Bengal and South Asia and less translatable into the universalist aesthetic frameworks that global literary circulation tends to favor.

CHAPTER TWO: WORLD MARXISM AND ITS LITERARY TRADITIONS: A COMPARATIVE MAP

2.1 The Making of Marxian Literary Theory: From Engels to the Present

Marxian literary theory has a history that is at once unified by certain fundamental commitments and deeply divided by disagreements about method, politics, and the relationship between aesthetic and political value. To situate the Bengali Marxian tradition within the broader history of Marxian literary thought, we need a map of that history and its major landmarks.

The foundations of Marxian literary theory were laid by Marx and Engels themselves in scattered observations, letters, and prefaces that addressed questions of literature and art without developing a systematic aesthetic theory. Engels's famous letters to the novelists Minna Kautsky and Margaret Harkness in the 1880s, in which he praised the realistic representation of social conditions and criticized tendentious writing in which the political message overwhelmed the aesthetic form, established the basic tension between political commitment and aesthetic autonomy that has run through Marxian literary theory ever since. Engels's praise for realism as the method most adequate to the representation of social reality, and his insistence that genuine realism required the representation of typical characters in typical situations, provided the foundation for the tradition of Marxian realism theory that Georg Lukacs would develop most systematically in the twentieth century.

Georg Lukacs, the Hungarian philosopher and literary theorist who spent significant parts of his life in Vienna, Berlin, Moscow, and Budapest, produced the most systematic and influential account of Marxian aesthetics in the classical realist tradition. His major works in literary theory, including "The Theory of the Novel" (1920), "History and Class Consciousness" (1923), the essays collected in "Studies in European Realism" (1950), and "The Historical Novel" (1955), developed a coherent theoretical framework centered on the concept of realism as the literary mode best capable of representing the totality of social relations and thereby generating the kind of class consciousness that could drive political transformation.

Lukacs's theory of realism was both enormously influential and enormously controversial. Its influence on Marxian literary thought in the twentieth century was profound, extending to Eastern European socialist realism, to significant currents in Western Marxian literary theory, and to several national traditions of Marxian literary scholarship including, as we will see, the Bengali tradition. But it was also challenged from many directions: by Bertolt Brecht, who argued that Lukacs's realism was aesthetically conservative and politically inadequate to the specific demands of the contemporary political struggle; by the Frankfurt School, particularly Theodor Adorno, who argued that the commitment to realism reflected a naively transparent conception of the relationship between literary form and social content; and by later theorists including Fredric Jameson and Raymond Williams, who attempted to develop more historically nuanced and theoretically sophisticated frameworks that could accommodate a wider range of literary practices.

The diversity of Marxian literary theory in the twentieth century is itself significant for our purposes. The Bengali tradition, as represented by scholars like Kafi, draws on several strands of

this theoretical diversity without being reducible to any single strand. The influence of Lukacs's theory of realism and typicality is present in the tradition's attention to the relationship between literary form and social content. The influence of Benjamin's theory of constellation and historical dialectics is present in the tradition's methodology of juxtaposing texts from different cultural registers. The influence of Gramsci's theory of hegemony is present in the tradition's attention to the role of cultural production in the struggle for political consciousness. This theoretical eclecticism, which might appear to be a weakness from the perspective of theoretical consistency, is actually a strength from the perspective of adequacy to the complexity of the specific historical reality that Bengali Marxian scholarship engages.

2.2 The Soviet Tradition and Socialist Realism: A Critical Assessment

The development of Soviet literary policy and its impact on Marxian literary theory globally is a story of extraordinary ambition and extraordinary tragedy. In the years immediately following the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Soviet literary and cultural scene was characterized by intense experimentation and theoretical innovation. The Russian Formalists, the Constructivists, the LEF group associated with Mayakovsky, and other avant-garde movements were exploring new forms of literary and cultural production adequate to the demands of the revolutionary moment. Figures like Leon Trotsky engaged seriously with these experiments, as his "Literature and Revolution" of 1924 demonstrates, and there was a genuine sense that the Marxian theoretical tradition needed to develop new aesthetic frameworks rather than simply applying classical European realism to a post-revolutionary situation.

This period of experimentation was curtailed by the consolidation of Stalinist power and the establishment of socialist realism as the official doctrine of Soviet literary and cultural production in 1934. Socialist realism, as it was institutionally enforced by the Soviet Writers' Union, required that literary works affirm the progressive development of Soviet society, represent heroes of the Soviet system in a positive and inspiring way, and be accessible to ordinary workers and peasants who lacked the education to appreciate the formal complexities of avant-garde experimentation. The aesthetic consequences of these requirements were, for the most part, deeply negative: socialist realism as officially practiced produced a body of literature that was politically servile, aesthetically rigid, and frequently dishonest about the actual conditions of Soviet life.

The Stalinist deformation of socialist realism had global consequences for Marxian literary thought. Communist parties outside the Soviet Union were expected to apply the doctrine of socialist realism to their own national literary traditions, and in many cases they did so in ways that were equally artistically destructive and politically dishonest. The Bengali left literary tradition was not immune to this pressure: the influence of the All India Progressive Writers' Association, which was closely linked to the Communist Party of India and in turn to the Soviet line, meant that certain versions of socialist realism had genuine influence on Bengali left literary culture in the 1940s and 1950s.

But the Bengali tradition was also, in important ways, more resistant to the worst deformations of socialist realism than many other national traditions. The richness and complexity of the Bengali literary heritage, including Tagore's sophisticated exploration of the relationship

between aesthetic form and human consciousness, provided intellectual resources that enabled Bengali Marxian critics to resist the most mechanistic applications of socialist realism. The specific history of Bengali literary culture, with its long tradition of combining aesthetic sophistication with political commitment, meant that the reduction of literary value to political utility was always contested. And the presence of figures like Sudhindranath Datta and Jibanananda Das in the Bengali literary landscape of the 1940s, whose work was formally experimental and aesthetically sophisticated in ways that resisted easy assimilation to socialist realist norms, maintained a tradition of aesthetic complexity even within a predominantly left-leaning intellectual culture.

2.3 The Frankfurt School and Western Marxism: A Different Tradition

The tradition of Western Marxism, developed primarily in Western Europe by the Frankfurt School and by thinkers including Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Raymond Williams, and Fredric Jameson, represents a significantly different approach to the question of literature and politics than either the Soviet socialist realist tradition or the classical Lukacian realism theory. Understanding this tradition is important for understanding the full range of theoretical resources available to a contemporary Bengali Marxian literary scholar.

The Frankfurt School's approach to aesthetics, most fully developed in Theodor Adorno's "Aesthetic Theory" and in various essays by Walter Benjamin, was shaped by the fundamental insight that in capitalist society, all cultural production is shaped by the logic of the culture industry and by the commodity form. The "culture industry," as Adorno and Horkheimer analyzed it in "Dialectic of Enlightenment" (1944), was the system of mass cultural production that substituted standardized cultural commodities for genuinely autonomous aesthetic experience, reducing cultural life to a form of ideological management that reproduced the passive, conformist consciousness required for capitalist domination.

Adorno's response to this diagnosis was a defense of aesthetic autonomy and formal complexity as the last refuge of genuine critical consciousness. For Adorno, genuinely significant art was art that resisted the demands of the culture industry through its formal intransigence, its refusal to be easily consumed, its maintenance of tensions and contradictions that refused the easy reconciliation with the existing social order that the culture industry demanded. This defense of formal complexity put Adorno in direct conflict with Lukacs's realism theory, which Adorno read as an aesthetically conservative position that sacrificed formal innovation to the demands of political legibility.

The Adorno-Lukacs debate, which is one of the central theoretical controversies in the history of Marxian aesthetics, has been enormously productive for subsequent literary theory, generating a range of positions between the two poles of formal intransigence and political realism that have informed Marxian literary thought across different national traditions. For the Bengali tradition, the debate is relevant because Bengali literature and Bengali Marxian scholarship have always had to navigate between the demands of formal complexity and the demands of political legibility, between the aesthetic sophistication of the major Bengali literary tradition and the political accessibility demanded by the organic intellectual's commitment to a broad popular audience.

2.4 Raymond Williams and Cultural Materialism

Raymond Williams, the Welsh Marxian cultural theorist whose career at Cambridge University spanned the 1950s through the 1980s, represents a distinctive tradition within Western Marxism that is particularly relevant to understanding the Bengali Marxian tradition. Williams developed what he called "cultural materialism," an approach to the analysis of culture that insisted on understanding cultural production in its material conditions of existence while refusing to reduce culture to a mere reflection of economic base.

Williams's most important theoretical contributions for our purposes include his concept of "structures of feeling": the specific ways of experiencing and feeling that are characteristic of particular historical moments and that are expressed in the literary and cultural production of those moments. Structures of feeling are not ideologies in the conventional Marxian sense, because they are not yet fully formulated into explicit beliefs and propositions. They are the lived, experiential dimension of social consciousness: the specific emotional and aesthetic coloring of a historical period that registers, in literary and cultural form, the tensions and pressures of social change before those tensions are fully articulated in explicit political and ideological terms.

Williams's concept of structures of feeling is directly relevant to the kind of literary analysis that Kafi practices. When Kafi analyzes the specific emotional and aesthetic register of Raktakarobi or Dhumketu, he is attending to precisely what Williams would call the structure of feeling of the early 1920s in Bengal: the specific ways in which the tensions of colonial exploitation, nationalist aspiration, and the beginning of organized labor and peasant resistance were being felt and expressed in the cultural production of that moment. Williams's framework provides a theoretical vocabulary for this kind of analysis that complements and extends the Marxian frameworks of ideology and class consciousness that Kafi more explicitly employs.

Williams also developed important concepts of "dominant," "residual," and "emergent" cultural practices that are useful for analyzing the complexity of any historical cultural moment. Dominant practices are those that are fully incorporated into the prevailing social formation and that reproduce its values and assumptions. Residual practices are those that were developed in earlier social formations but continue to be significant in the present, either because they have been incorporated into the dominant culture or because they maintain a degree of critical distance from it. Emergent practices are those that represent genuinely new values and assumptions that may eventually challenge and transform the dominant culture.

This triadic framework is particularly useful for analyzing the Bengali cultural landscape of the early 1920s, the historical moment that Kafi's scholarship engages most directly. In that moment, the dominant cultural practices were those of the colonial system and its Bengali collaborators: the culture of the bhadralok intelligentsia, with its complex accommodation to colonial modernity, its valorization of education, refinement, and respectability, and its ambiguous relationship to both tradition and progress. The residual practices included the pre-colonial traditions of Bengali folk culture, religious practice, and communal life that maintained vitality within but in tension with the modernizing imperatives of the colonial order. And the emergent practices were precisely those that Kafi analyzes: the revolutionary journalism of Dhumketu, the

politically engaged theater of Raktakarobi, the peasant movement journalism of Langol, all of which represented genuinely new cultural formations that pointed toward social possibilities not yet realized.

CHAPTER THREE: LATIN AMERICAN MARXIAN LITERARY SCHOLARSHIP: A COMPARATIVE ENCOUNTER

3.1 The Latin American Context: Dependency Theory and Cultural Analysis

Latin America has produced a tradition of Marxian intellectual thought that is in many respects the closest parallel to the Bengali Marxian tradition in terms of its specific character, its historical context, and its intellectual resources. Like Bengal, Latin America developed its Marxian intellectual traditions in the context of colonial and neocolonial domination, in societies where the relationship between the colonial metropolitan center and the postcolonial periphery was not merely a historical background but a living reality that shaped every dimension of social and cultural life. Like the Bengali tradition, Latin American Marxian thought developed distinctive frameworks for understanding the relationship between imperialism, underdevelopment, and cultural production that went beyond the European Marxian tradition in important ways.

The most important theoretical development in Latin American Marxism for our purposes is dependency theory, associated primarily with the work of Andre Gunder Frank, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Enzo Faletto, Theotonio Dos Santos, and Samir Amin. Dependency theory argued that the underdevelopment of the Global South was not a stage in a universal process of capitalist development but the direct product of the integration of peripheral societies into the world capitalist system in a subordinate position. The development of the metropolitan center and the underdevelopment of the periphery were not independent processes but two sides of the same coin: the accumulation of capital at the center required and produced the underdevelopment of the periphery.

This framework had important implications for the analysis of culture and literature in the Latin American context. If underdevelopment was not a natural condition but a product of specific historical relationships of exploitation and domination, then the cultural production of underdeveloped societies needed to be analyzed not in terms of its failure to measure up to metropolitan cultural standards but in terms of its specific historical conditions of production and its specific cultural responses to those conditions. The literature of the periphery was not simply an inferior version of metropolitan literature but a distinctive literary formation shaped by distinctive historical pressures and expressing distinctive cultural responses.

The parallel with the Bengali Marxian tradition is striking. Both traditions insist on the importance of analyzing cultural production in terms of its specific historical conditions of production rather than measuring it against metropolitan standards. Both traditions identify the relationship between colonial domination and cultural formation as a central problematic. And

both traditions draw on the resources of their own literary and cultural heritage while engaging critically with the European Marxian theoretical tradition.

3.2 Jose Carlos Mariategui and the Peruvian Tradition

Jose Carlos Mariategui, the Peruvian Marxist theorist and cultural critic who founded the journal *Amauta* in 1926, is one of the most important figures in the history of Latin American Marxism and one of the most significant parallels to the Bengali tradition of politically engaged intellectual work. Mariategui's "Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality," published in 1928 and one of the foundational texts of Latin American Marxian thought, represents an approach to the relationship between culture, history, and political economy that has significant parallels with the approach characteristic of the Bengali Marxian tradition.

Mariategui's distinctive contribution was his insistence on the importance of the indigenous cultural tradition as a resource for socialist politics in Peru, his refusal to accept the stagist view that Latin American societies needed to pass through a stage of bourgeois capitalist development before socialism became possible, and his commitment to developing a Marxism adequate to the specific conditions of Latin American societies rather than simply applying European frameworks to a different context. His concept of "mythic socialism," which drew on the communal traditions of indigenous Andean communities as a cultural resource for socialist politics, was both theoretically innovative and politically significant.

The parallel with Abdul Kafi's engagement with the cultural resources of the Bengali revolutionary tradition is instructive. Kafi's analysis of Nazrul's revolutionary Islam, his attention to the ways in which religious and cultural traditions can be resources for political liberation rather than simply obstacles to it, and his insistence on developing a Marxian literary criticism adequate to the specific conditions of Bengali cultural history rather than simply applying European frameworks, all reflect a similar methodological orientation to Mariategui's approach to Peruvian cultural and political analysis.

The journal *Amauta* that Mariategui founded is also a significant parallel to the Bengali journals and publications that figure centrally in Kafi's scholarship. Like *Langol* and *Dhumketu*, *Amauta* was a politically engaged cultural publication that sought to connect literary and intellectual work to the broader project of social and political transformation. It brought together contributions from various political and cultural perspectives, sought to develop a genuinely Peruvian Marxism that acknowledged the specific cultural resources of the indigenous tradition, and understood the task of cultural and intellectual work as inseparable from the task of political organization and consciousness-raising.

3.3 Pablo Neruda, Cesar Vallejo, and the Politics of Poetry

The tradition of politically engaged poetry in Latin America, represented most powerfully by Pablo Neruda and Cesar Vallejo, offers a comparative perspective on the question of how political commitment and aesthetic excellence can be combined in a non-European context that is directly relevant to understanding the Bengali tradition.

Pablo Neruda's trajectory from the intimist, erotic poetry of his early work to the epic political poetry of "Canto General" (1950) and beyond illustrates the possibility of combining extraordinary aesthetic achievement with deep political commitment in a way that is not reducible to either socialist realism or formal avant-gardism. Neruda's political poetry is both genuinely politically committed and genuinely aesthetically powerful: it draws on the resources of the Latin American literary tradition, on the landscape and history of the continent, on the popular culture and the revolutionary history of the region, to produce poetry that is simultaneously local and universal, specific and epic, personal and political.

The parallel with Kazi Nazrul Islam's trajectory is striking. Nazrul, like Neruda, moved from early lyric poetry of extraordinary emotional power toward increasingly engaged political poetry that drew on the resources of the Bengali and Islamic cultural tradition to produce work that was simultaneously aesthetically sophisticated and politically committed. Both poets used the resources of their specific cultural traditions, including folk music, religious symbolism, and the imagery of landscape and historical struggle, to create politically engaged poetry that resisted the reduction of political commitment to propaganda without abandoning the political dimension of their work.

Cesar Vallejo, the Peruvian poet whose "Trilce" (1922) and "Poemas humanos" (1939) represent perhaps the highest achievement of the Latin American avant-garde, offers a different but equally relevant parallel. Vallejo's poetic practice combined formal experimentation of the most radical kind with an intense engagement with the specific sufferings of the poor and the dispossessed: the relationship between formal innovation and political commitment in his work challenges the simple opposition between avant-garde formalism and political realism that structured much of the debate in Marxian aesthetics.

For the Bengali Marxian tradition, Vallejo's work suggests the possibility of a literary practice that is simultaneously more formally innovative than Lukacs's theory of realism allows and more politically engaged than Adorno's defense of aesthetic autonomy permits. This synthesis, which Vallejo achieves with such extraordinary power in his late poetry, is one of the aspirations of the Bengali left literary tradition at its best, even if the specific formal means by which that synthesis is achieved are different in the Bengali context.

3.4 Roberto Fernandez Retamar and the Question of Cultural Identity

Roberto Fernandez Retamar's "Caliban: Notes Toward a Discussion of Culture in Our America," published in 1971, represents one of the most important contributions of Latin American Marxism to the question of cultural identity and its political significance in the formerly colonized world. Retamar's essay, drawing on Shakespeare's "The Tempest" and Aime Cesaire's anti-colonial rereading of that play, argued that the cultural identity of Latin America should be understood not in terms of Ariel, the colonized intellectual who serves the colonial master in exchange for a degree of cultural freedom, but in terms of Caliban, the subjugated native who responds to colonization with resistance and whose very language, learned from the colonizer, becomes a weapon of liberation.

Retamar's framework is relevant to the Bengali tradition in several ways. The question of how the colonized intellectual relates to the cultural resources of both the colonial tradition and the pre-colonial indigenous tradition is central to the Bengali intellectual project as Kafi represents it. Kafi's engagement with Tagore is, in a sense, an engagement with the most Ariel-like dimension of the Bengali tradition: the sophisticated, cosmopolitan intellectual who absorbed European literary and philosophical culture and transformed it into something genuinely Bengali and universally significant. His engagement with Nazrul is, in a sense, an engagement with a more Calibanesque figure: the poet who took the language and culture of the colonial encounter and used them to express the rage and aspiration of the colonized.

But the relationship is more complex than the simple Ariel-Caliban binary suggests. Both Tagore and Nazrul were more complex than either figure alone captures. And the Bengali tradition's engagement with the colonial encounter has produced cultural forms that cannot be adequately understood through any single binary opposition, however useful that opposition may be as a starting point for analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR: AFRICAN MARXIAN LITERARY SCHOLARSHIP: CONNECTIONS AND CONTRASTS

4.1 Negritude and Its Marxian Dimensions

The Negritude movement, founded in the 1930s by Aime Cesaire, Leopold Sedar Senghor, and Leon-Gontran Damas, represents one of the most significant attempts to develop a literary and intellectual tradition that simultaneously affirms the value of African culture and engages with the Marxian critique of colonialism and capitalism. The movement's founding moment was, like the Bengali Marxian tradition's founding moment, a response to the experience of colonial domination and the ideological devaluation of the colonized culture.

Aime Cesaire's "Notebook of a Return to My Native Land," published in 1939, is one of the foundational texts of both Negritude and of anti-colonial literature more broadly. Cesaire's poetry combined the formal innovations of French surrealism with an intense political engagement with the conditions of colonized people in the Caribbean and Africa. His use of surrealist techniques in the service of anti-colonial politics was a formal innovation with significant theoretical implications: it demonstrated that the most formally experimental aspects of the European avant-garde tradition could be appropriated and transformed in the service of anti-colonial cultural politics.

The comparison with Nazrul Islam's use of both Islamic and Hindu cultural traditions in the service of revolutionary politics is instructive. Both Cesaire and Nazrul drew on cultural resources from multiple traditions, including but not limited to European ones, and transformed them in ways that served their specific political and cultural purposes. Both represented the possibility of a cultural politics that was neither simply assimilation to European norms nor simple rejection of European culture in favor of an idealized pre-colonial tradition, but a complex, creative, and politically engaged synthesis.

Senghor's contribution to Negritude was more complex and in some ways more controversial. His concept of "African personality," with its emphasis on the distinctive emotional and aesthetic characteristics of African culture as opposed to European rationalism, was criticized by subsequent generations of African intellectuals, including Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe, for its essentialism and its unwitting reproduction of certain European stereotypes about African culture. The critique of Negritude's essentialism from within the African intellectual tradition is a significant parallel to the critique of certain forms of Bengali cultural nationalism from within the Bengali Marxian tradition.

4.2 Frantz Fanon and the Wretched of the Earth

Frantz Fanon's "The Wretched of the Earth," published in 1961 and one of the most important texts in the history of anti-colonial thought, offers a framework for understanding the relationship between colonial domination, cultural devaluation, and the psychology and politics of liberation that is directly relevant to the Bengali Marxian tradition's engagement with similar questions.

Fanon's analysis of the "pitfalls of national consciousness," his warning that the achievement of formal political independence could be captured by a native bourgeoisie that reproduced the structures of colonial domination in a new form, is one of the most penetrating analyses of the limitations of nationalist politics in the postcolonial world. It applies directly to the Indian situation: the argument that the Indian independence movement was captured by a bourgeois nationalism that maintained the basic structures of economic exploitation while changing the nationality of the exploiters is a fundamental Marxian critique of Indian nationalism that the Bengali Marxian tradition has consistently maintained.

Fanon's analysis of the role of culture in the anti-colonial struggle is equally significant. He argued that the colonial system operated not merely through physical coercion but through the systematic devaluation of the colonized culture, the destruction of the colonized people's sense of their own history, their own values, and their own humanity. The anti-colonial struggle therefore required not merely political and economic liberation but cultural decolonization: the recovery and reaffirmation of the value of the colonized culture as a precondition for genuine political and economic liberation.

This analysis connects directly to the project of Bengali Marxian literary scholarship. The recovery and reanalysis of Bengali literary and cultural texts from the perspective of the oppressed, the reading of these texts as records of resistance and aspiration rather than mere cultural artifacts, the insistence on the political significance of literary and cultural production in the context of colonial domination: all of these dimensions of Kafi's scholarly practice can be understood, through Fanon's framework, as contributions to the ongoing project of cultural decolonization.

4.3 Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Politics of Language

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the Kenyan novelist and theorist who made the momentous decision in 1977 to stop writing in English and to write exclusively in his native Gikuyu, is one of the most

important figures in the global debate about the politics of language in postcolonial intellectual and literary life. Ngugi's "Decolonising the Mind," published in 1986, developed the theoretical framework for his decision and offered a systematic analysis of the ways in which the imposition of European languages on colonized peoples had been a fundamental mechanism of cultural domination.

Ngugi's argument was that language was not merely a medium of communication but the carrier of a culture, a worldview, a way of organizing experience and understanding the world. The imposition of English as the language of education, intellectual life, and literary prestige in colonial Africa had not merely created a linguistic barrier between African intellectuals and the masses of the people. It had imposed a particular way of seeing and understanding the world that was alien to the African experience and that systematically devalued the knowledge, the values, and the perspectives embedded in African languages and oral traditions.

The parallel with Abdul Kafi's decision to write in Bengali rather than in English is direct and significant. Kafi's choice is not merely a practical matter of reaching his primary audience but a political and philosophical statement about the relationship between language, culture, and intellectual work. Like Ngugi, Kafi operates within a tradition that insists on the importance of the vernacular as the proper medium for genuinely engaged intellectual work in a postcolonial context. Like Ngugi, he accepts the costs of this choice, including the reduced visibility within the global academic market, in favor of a deeper engagement with his primary intellectual and cultural community.

The comparison is not without its complications. The situation of Gikuyu in Kenya is different from the situation of Bengali in India in important ways. Bengali is a language with a much larger number of speakers, a much longer written literary tradition, and a much higher degree of institutional recognition than Gikuyu. Bengali is not a minority language in the way that Gikuyu is a minority language in the global context of English-dominated intellectual life. But the fundamental issue, the political significance of the choice to write in the vernacular rather than in the colonial language, is the same in both cases.

4.4 Chinua Achebe and the African Novel

Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart," published in 1958, is frequently cited as the founding text of modern African literature in English, and Achebe himself was one of the most important theorists of the African novel's specific character and responsibilities. His essays on the African novel, collected in "Morning Yet on Creation Day" (1975) and "Hopes and Impediments" (1988), offer a framework for thinking about the relationship between cultural identity, literary form, and political commitment that is relevant to our comparative analysis.

Achebe argued that the African novel had a specific responsibility to represent African culture and history from the inside, to challenge the dehumanizing representations of Africa produced by European literature and to affirm the dignity, complexity, and humanity of African people and their cultures. This responsibility was not, for Achebe, incompatible with aesthetic sophistication or literary ambition. On the contrary, genuine literary achievement required the kind of honest

and complex representation of the full range of human experience that a genuinely anti-colonial literature demanded.

The parallel with the Bengali Marxian tradition's understanding of the political responsibilities of literary scholarship is direct. Kafi's scholarship, like Achebe's fiction, is animated by the conviction that literature has responsibilities to the communities from whose experience it grows, that literary and cultural analysis must be answerable to the political realities of those communities, and that genuine aesthetic achievement is not incompatible with but requires this kind of political responsibility.

CHAPTER FIVE: CHINESE MARXIAN LITERARY THOUGHT: A SPECIFIC COMPARISON

5.1 The Chinese Revolutionary Literary Tradition

The relationship between Marxian thought and Chinese literature is one of the most important and most complex chapters in the global history of Marxian cultural theory. The Chinese communist revolution, the largest and most successful revolutionary movement in the history of the twentieth century, developed a distinctive approach to the relationship between literature, culture, and political struggle that has been enormously influential within East and Southeast Asia and that offers an important comparative perspective for understanding the Bengali Marxian tradition.

The founding moment of the Marxian approach to Chinese literature is usually identified with the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art, convened by Mao Zedong in 1942. Mao's "Talks at the Yan'an Forum," which established the basic framework for the Chinese Communist Party's approach to cultural policy, argued that literature and art must serve the workers, peasants, and soldiers: the basic masses of Chinese society whose struggles the revolution was designed to advance. This populist, mass-oriented approach to cultural production was consistent with the Soviet socialist realist framework but had a distinctive Chinese character rooted in the specific conditions of the Chinese revolutionary movement, including its predominantly rural base, its emphasis on mass mobilization, and its engagement with Chinese folk culture.

The parallel with the Bengali Marxian tradition's engagement with popular culture and with the culture of the peasantry and working class is significant. Both traditions insist on the importance of connecting literary and cultural production to the lives and struggles of the basic masses. Both resist the *bhadralok* or mandarin tendency to treat high literary culture as the only legitimate object of scholarly attention. And both face the tension between this populist commitment and the aesthetic sophistication of the literary traditions they work within.

5.2 Lu Xun and the May Fourth Movement

Lu Xun, the Chinese writer and intellectual who is widely regarded as the greatest Chinese writer of the twentieth century, represents a figure in the Chinese literary tradition that is in many ways

comparable to Rabindranath Tagore in the Bengali tradition: a writer of world-class literary achievement who was simultaneously deeply engaged with the political and cultural transformation of his society. The comparison is instructive and the differences are illuminating.

Lu Xun's major fictional works, "A Madman's Diary," "The True Story of Ah Q," and "Call to Arms," were produced in the context of the May Fourth Movement of 1919, the Chinese cultural revolution that was roughly contemporaneous with the period of Bengali literary production that Kafi's scholarship engages. Like Dhumketu in Bengal, the May Fourth Movement sought to break with traditional Chinese cultural norms and develop a new cultural politics adequate to the demands of a changing world. Like Nazrul in Bengal, Lu Xun combined intense cultural criticism with a commitment to the liberation of the oppressed and the transformation of Chinese society.

The difference between Lu Xun and Tagore is also instructive. Where Tagore's engagement with the political dimensions of his work was often indirect, mediated through allegory and symbolism, Lu Xun's was direct and uncompromising. Where Tagore maintained a degree of aesthetic distance from the immediate political struggles of his time, Lu Xun immersed himself in them, writing essays, polemics, and short stories that engaged directly with the specific political and cultural questions of the moment. This difference reflects both personal temperament and the different political contexts within which the two writers worked: the Chinese context of the 1910s and 1920s, with its intense political upheaval, warlordism, and the beginning of the communist movement, demanded a different kind of cultural engagement than the Indian context, where the colonial order was more stable and the nationalist movement more gradualist.

5.3 Mao's Literary Theory and Its Limitations

Mao Zedong's literary theory, as expressed in the Yan'an Talks, has been enormously influential within the Chinese literary tradition and within Asian Marxian thought more broadly. But it has also been criticized from many directions for its tendency to reduce the question of literary value to the question of political utility: its insistence that literature must serve the masses, combined with a populist suspicion of formal complexity and aesthetic sophistication, produced a framework that was in certain respects less adequate to the complexity of literary experience than either the Bengali Marxian tradition or the Frankfurt School's aesthetic theory.

The limitations of Mao's literary theory became most apparent in the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976, when the insistence on politically correct, mass-accessible literature reached its most extreme expression and produced the most devastating suppression of artistic and intellectual freedom in modern Chinese history. The destruction of traditional Chinese culture, the persecution of intellectuals, and the reduction of literary production to a small number of approved "model works" represented the logical endpoint of a literary theory that subordinated aesthetic value entirely to political utility.

The contrast with the Bengali Marxian tradition is significant. While the Bengali left literary culture was not entirely immune to the pressures of political orthodoxy, as the influence of Soviet cultural policy on the All India Progressive Writers' Association in the Stalinist period

demonstrated, it maintained a higher degree of aesthetic sophistication and a more complex understanding of the relationship between literary form and political function than the most extreme versions of Mao's literary populism. The Bengali tradition's engagement with figures like Tagore, whose aesthetic sophistication and formal complexity are among the most extraordinary achievements in world literature, provided a standard of literary excellence that could not easily be subordinated to the demands of political accessibility.

5.4 Contemporary Chinese Literary Theory and Global Engagement

Contemporary Chinese literary scholarship has undergone significant transformations since the reform and opening-up period beginning in the late 1970s. Chinese scholars have engaged extensively with Western literary theory, including both Marxian and non-Marxian frameworks, producing a sophisticated body of literary theoretical work that is increasingly engaged with global intellectual debates. The emergence of world literature studies as a significant field within Chinese literary scholarship reflects the broader globalization of the discipline and the increasing integration of Chinese universities into the global academic conversation.

For the Bengali Marxian tradition, the contemporary Chinese experience raises important questions about the relationship between political commitment and theoretical openness, between the maintenance of a specifically national and culturally rooted intellectual tradition and the engagement with global theoretical frameworks. Chinese literary scholars have managed, with varying degrees of success, to engage with the full range of global literary theory while maintaining a distinctive Chinese perspective rooted in the specific history and culture of Chinese literature. The Bengali tradition faces a similar challenge, and the comparative study of how different postcolonial literary traditions have navigated this challenge offers valuable insights for understanding the specific situation of Bengali Marxian scholarship.

CHAPTER SIX: ARAB MARXIAN LITERARY THOUGHT: ANOTHER COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

6.1 The Arab Cultural Renaissance and Marxian Politics

The Nahda, the Arab cultural renaissance of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, represents a significant parallel to the Bengali Renaissance in its engagement with the question of how a society shaped by a rich classical tradition could respond to the challenges of Western colonial modernity. Like the Bengali Renaissance, the Nahda produced both genuine intellectual achievements and deep contradictions: its engagement with Western liberalism and nationalism coexisted with a complex relationship to Islamic tradition and a growing consciousness of colonial domination.

The Marxian tradition in Arab intellectual life developed primarily in the context of the nationalist and anti-colonial movements of the twentieth century, particularly in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine. Figures like Jurji Zaydan, Shibli Shumayyil, and later Hussain Murwa and Mehdi Amel developed distinctive approaches to the relationship between Marxian

thought, Arab cultural tradition, and the specific conditions of Arab societies under colonial and neocolonial domination.

Mehdi Amel, the Lebanese Marxian philosopher who was assassinated in 1987, represents one of the most significant figures in Arab Marxian thought and one of the most important parallels to the kind of intellectual work that Abdul Kafi represents. Amel developed a systematic critique of what he called "Arab nationalist thought" from a Marxian perspective, arguing that Arab nationalism's failure to engage adequately with the class dimensions of Arab society had led it to substitute the mystification of cultural identity for the analysis of social exploitation. His insistence on the primacy of class analysis while acknowledging the specific historical conditions of Arab societies under colonial domination represents a theoretical position that has significant parallels with the Bengali Marxian tradition's approach to the relationship between class analysis and cultural specificity.

6.2 Palestinian Literary Resistance: Mahmoud Darwish and the Politics of Exile

Palestinian literature and cultural thought offer a particularly powerful comparative perspective for understanding the relationship between literature, political struggle, and the politics of identity and exile. Mahmoud Darwish, the Palestinian poet who is widely regarded as one of the greatest Arab poets of the twentieth century, developed a literary practice that combined extraordinary aesthetic achievement with an intense political engagement with the specific conditions of Palestinian dispossession and resistance.

The comparison between Darwish and Nazrul Islam is suggestive, though the political contexts are different in important ways. Both are poets whose work is simultaneously deeply rooted in a specific cultural and historical experience and expressive of more universal themes of liberation, resistance, and the longing for justice. Both draw on the resources of their specific cultural and religious traditions, including both Islamic and indigenous pre-Islamic cultural elements, in the service of a politically engaged poetry that refuses the reduction of political commitment to propaganda. And both have achieved a degree of global recognition that makes their work among the most widely read politically engaged poetry in the world.

But the differences are equally instructive. Darwish's condition of exile, his literally stateless existence as a Palestinian without a homeland, gives his poetry a specific dimension of geographical longing and political urgency that differs from Nazrul's situation as a Muslim Bengali subject of the British colonial system. The specific form of dispossession and political struggle that shapes Palestinian literary culture is different from the specific form that shaped Bengali revolutionary culture in the 1920s, even as both reflect the fundamental experience of colonial domination and the aspiration for liberation.

6.3 Adonis and the Question of Modernism in Arabic Literature

Adonis, the Syrian-Lebanese poet and literary theorist whose work has been central to the development of modernist Arabic poetry, represents a different dimension of the comparative analysis. Adonis's theoretical project, developed in his major work "Al-Thabit wa'l-Mutahawwil"

(The Static and the Dynamic), offered a systematic historical analysis of the tension between tradition and innovation in Arabic cultural and intellectual history.

Adonis's argument, broadly speaking, was that Arabic culture has been characterized by a persistent tension between a conservative tendency that valorizes tradition, orthodoxy, and the authority of the past, and a dynamic tendency that embraces innovation, critique, and the possibility of cultural transformation. This tension has been reproduced across different historical periods and different cultural domains, from poetry and philosophy to religion and politics.

The parallel with the Bengali intellectual tradition's engagement with a similar tension, between the authority of the classical Bengali and Sanskrit literary tradition, the valorization of Tagore as an unquestionable cultural authority, and the need for critical innovation and political engagement, is significant. Both traditions have had to negotiate between the genuine value of their classical heritage and the need for critical rethinking that the demands of the contemporary moment impose. And both have produced thinkers who have found ways of being simultaneously deeply respectful of the classical tradition and fundamentally critical of the authority structures within which that tradition has been institutionalized.

CHAPTER SEVEN: TRANSLATION AND THE POLITICS OF LITERARY CIRCULATION

7.1 The Theory of Translation and Its Political Dimensions

The question of translation is fundamental to any serious engagement with world literature and with the global circulation of literary and intellectual production. Translation is not merely a technical process of transferring meaning from one language to another. It is a political process through which certain texts are deemed worth translating, certain cultural traditions are deemed accessible to global audiences, and certain meanings are preserved while others are inevitably lost or transformed.

The political economy of translation has been analyzed from several perspectives. Lawrence Venuti's work on the "translator's invisibility" argued that the dominant norms of translation in the English-speaking world, which valorize "fluent" translations that read as if they were originally written in English, systematically erase the foreignness of the translated text and thereby reinforce the cultural imperialism of the English-language market. By making translated texts appear natural and unmediated, fluent translation conceals the labor of translation and the cultural work that it performs.

Spivak's engagement with the politics of translation, in essays like "The Politics of Translation" and in her own practice as a translator of Mahasweta Devi's fiction, insists on the importance of maintaining the foreignness of the source text in translation, of resisting the domestication of the text within the norms of the target language. For Spivak, the translator's responsibility is not to make the text accessible to readers who do not know the source language but to force those

readers to encounter the specific cultural and linguistic resources of the source text in ways that challenge their assumptions and expand their intellectual horizons.

This framework is directly relevant to the question of how Bengali Marxian literary scholarship might be made accessible to global audiences without distorting its specific character. The translation of Kafi's work into English, for example, would require not merely finding English equivalents for Bengali concepts and idioms but conveying something of the specific cultural and historical context within which those concepts and idioms are embedded. A translation that simply rendered Kafi's Bengali arguments into standard academic English would lose precisely what is most distinctive and most valuable about the Bengali tradition: its specific rootedness in the history of Bengal, its use of the specific resources of the Bengali literary tradition, and its engagement with the specific political and cultural questions that Bengal's history poses.

7.2 Tagore in Translation: The Politics of Global Reception

Tagore's global reception offers one of the most important case studies in the politics of literary translation and the ways in which the translation and circulation of literary texts can both open and close pathways of genuine intercultural understanding. Tagore's Nobel Prize in 1913 was based primarily on W.B. Yeats's introduction to the English translation of "Gitanjali," which presented Tagore's work through the lens of the Celtic Revival's interest in spirituality, mysticism, and the recovery of pre-modern cultural traditions. This framing made Tagore legible within the framework of European literary modernism's interest in non-Western spirituality as a counterweight to the materialism and rationalism of European civilization.

But this framing also systematically decontextualized Tagore's work, separating his lyrical poetry from the political, philosophical, and critical dimensions of his larger project. The Tagore who wrote *Raktakarobi* and other politically engaged plays, the Tagore who developed a devastating critique of nationalism in "The Home and the World," the Tagore who engaged in sustained dialogue with Gandhi about the relative merits of non-violent civil disobedience and cultural transformation: this Tagore was far less visible in the global reception than the mystical, lyrical Tagore that Yeats's introduction brought to prominence.

This selective translation and reception of Tagore's work has had significant consequences for the global understanding of Bengali literary culture. It has created an image of Bengali literary culture that emphasizes its spiritual and aesthetic dimensions at the expense of its political and critical ones. It has made it easier for global audiences to appreciate Tagore as a universal poet of the human spirit than as a specifically Bengali intellectual engaged with the specific political and cultural questions of colonial India. And it has, in effect, reproduced within the global literary field the very separation between aesthetics and politics that the Bengali Marxian tradition insists on questioning.

7.3 The Translation Problem in Marxian Literary Scholarship

The translation of Marxian literary theory and scholarship across linguistic and cultural contexts raises specific problems that go beyond the general issues of translation theory. Marxian concepts are often embedded in specific philosophical and linguistic contexts that make their

translation genuinely difficult. The German concept of "Weltanschauung," the French concept of "ideologie," the Italian concept of "egemonia": each of these carries specific connotations derived from the specific intellectual history of the language in which it was developed, and their translation into other languages always involves some degree of conceptual simplification or distortion.

For the Bengali Marxian tradition, this translation problem is doubled. Bengali-language Marxian scholarship involves the translation of European Marxian concepts into Bengali intellectual contexts, which introduces one layer of transformation. The potential translation of that Bengali-language scholarship into English for global audiences involves a second layer. At each stage, the risk of conceptual distortion must be managed through a combination of genuine linguistic skill, deep historical knowledge, and theoretical sophistication.

The most important Bengali Marxian texts have not been systematically translated into English, and this untranslatedness is itself a significant fact about the global intellectual landscape. It means that the Bengali contribution to the global conversation about Marxian literary theory remains largely invisible to scholars who do not read Bengali. It means that the specific resources of the Bengali Marxian tradition, its particular ways of connecting cultural analysis to political economy, its specific historical examples and case studies, and its distinctive theoretical emphases, are not available to global scholars who might benefit from engaging with them. And it means that the development of the Bengali tradition itself is less enriched by global conversation than it would be if that conversation were more genuinely bilateral.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE QUESTION OF REALISM AND ITS VARIANTS IN WORLD MARXIAN LITERARY THOUGHT

8.1 The Realism Debate: A Global Perspective

The question of realism has been central to the history of Marxian literary theory globally, and the specific forms of the realism debate in different national traditions illuminate both the universal dimensions of the question and the specific forms it takes in different historical and cultural contexts. The realism debate, in its most basic form, is about the relationship between literary representation and social reality: what does it mean for a literary work to represent social reality "realistically," what kinds of knowledge does such representation make possible, and what are the political implications of different modes of literary representation?

In the European Marxian tradition, the realism debate was shaped primarily by the Lukacs-Brecht-Adorno triangle that we have already discussed: Lukacs's defense of classical realism as the literary mode most adequate to the representation of social totality, Brecht's defense of alienation effects and formal experimentation as the modes most adequate to producing critical consciousness in the audience, and Adorno's defense of aesthetic autonomy and formal complexity as the modes most resistant to the ideological capture of the culture industry.

In the Latin American tradition, the realism debate took a distinctive form shaped by the specific conditions of Latin American literary production. The tradition of magical realism, associated with Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Alejo Carpentier, and other writers, represented a specific response to the question of how to represent the specific social reality of Latin American societies, in which the boundaries between the everyday and the extraordinary, the natural and the supernatural, were experienced differently than in European secular modernity. Magical realism was, from this perspective, not a retreat from realism but a different kind of realism: a realism adequate to the specific character of Latin American social reality.

In the African tradition, the realism debate was shaped by the question of how to represent the experience of colonialism and its aftermath in literary forms that were adequate to that experience without simply reproducing the structures of European realism that had been developed in a different historical context. Chinua Achebe's decision to write the novel of Igbo society in the form of the English-language novel, but to transform that form from the inside by introducing Igbo proverbs, idioms, and cultural perspectives, represented a specific solution to the problem of how to use a colonial cultural form in the service of an anti-colonial cultural politics.

8.2 Bengali Realism and Its Specific Character

The question of realism in Bengali literature has a specific history and a specific character that distinguishes it from both the European and the Latin American realism traditions. Bengali literary realism developed in the nineteenth century primarily through the novels of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, and it was shaped by the specific conditions of Bengali social life under colonialism: the structures of family and caste, the economic transformations produced by colonial capitalism, the specific forms of social inequality and suffering that characterized rural and urban Bengali society.

Bengali literary realism is not identical with European social realism, though it engages with and transforms European models. It has its own specific character: a particular sensitivity to the emotional dimensions of social relations, a specific attention to the structures of family and kinship through which social inequality is reproduced, and a particular way of relating the individual consciousness to social structures that reflects the specific philosophical and cultural resources of the Bengali tradition.

Manik Bandyopadhyay, one of the greatest Bengali realist writers of the twentieth century, developed a form of social realism that was deeply influenced by Marxian thought and that engaged directly with the conditions of poverty, exploitation, and social degradation in Bengal with a relentless, unsparing honesty that distinguished it from both the sentimental realism of Sarat Chandra and the symbolic or allegorical realism of Tagore. Bandyopadhyay's "The Boatman of the Padma" and "Puppets" are among the greatest achievements of Marxian social realism in any language, and they represent a tradition of Bengali literary achievement that the Bengali Marxian scholarly tradition has recognized and analyzed with appropriate seriousness.

Kafi's scholarship engages with this tradition in complex ways. His analysis of *Raktakarobi*, which is not a realist play in the conventional sense but rather a symbolic and allegorical drama,

requires a more flexible understanding of the relationship between literary form and political function than classical realism theory provides. His engagement with *Dhumketu* as a form of political journalism, and with *Langol* as a movement journal, extends the concept of politically significant cultural production beyond the boundaries of conventional literary realism entirely. This methodological flexibility, this willingness to analyze different kinds of texts using different analytical frameworks while maintaining a consistent political orientation, is one of the most important features of the Bengali Marxian tradition's specific contribution to the global conversation about literature and politics.

8.3 Fredric Jameson and the Political Unconscious: Applications and Limitations

Fredric Jameson's "The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act," published in 1981 and one of the most important works of Marxian literary theory in English, offers a framework for understanding the relationship between narrative form and social content that is relevant to our analysis of the Bengali tradition and its global position.

Jameson's central claim was that all literary texts, including those that appear to be purely aesthetic or formal, have a political dimension: they are "socially symbolic acts" that negotiate, at the level of narrative and form, the political and social contradictions of the historical moment in which they are produced. The "political unconscious" of a text is the repressed or displaced political content that finds expression through the specific forms of narrative, the specific characters and their relationships, the specific resolution or non-resolution of narrative conflict.

Jameson's framework is both powerful and limited in its application to the Bengali tradition. Its power lies in its insistence on the political significance of all cultural production, not merely explicitly political texts, and in its sophisticated analysis of the ways in which political content is expressed through formal and narrative strategies. Applied to Bengali literary texts, Jameson's method can illuminate the political dimensions of literary works that are not obviously political, including the ways in which even the most apparently aesthetic and personal works of the Bengali literary tradition are shaped by the historical and social contradictions of their moment.

But Jameson's framework also has limitations from the perspective of a Bengali Marxian analysis. His framework was developed primarily in relation to European and North American literary texts, and its specific analytical categories reflect the specific forms of ideological contradiction that characterize capitalist modernity in its Euro-American form. When applied to texts produced in the conditions of colonial Bengal, some adjustment is required, because the specific forms of contradiction that structure colonial social reality are different from those that structure metropolitan capitalist society. The contradiction between colonizer and colonized, between the nationalist aspiration for liberation and the material conditions of colonial subjection, between the religious and cultural traditions of the colonized people and the ideological imperatives of colonial modernization: these are not identical with the contradictions that Jameson's framework was primarily designed to analyze.

CHAPTER NINE: IMPERIALISM, WORLD-SYSTEMS THEORY, AND THE POSITION OF BENGALI LITERATURE

9.1 World-Systems Theory and the Global Literary Hierarchy

Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory, developed in "The Modern World-System" (1974) and subsequent works, provides a framework for understanding the global hierarchy of capitalist development that is directly relevant to understanding the position of Bengali literary culture within the global literary field. Wallerstein argued that the capitalist world-economy is organized as a hierarchical system with a core, a semiperiphery, and a periphery. Core regions accumulate capital at the expense of peripheral regions through mechanisms of unequal exchange, the extraction of surplus value through trade relations that systematically undervalue the labor and resources of the periphery.

This framework has been applied to the global literary field by scholars including Moretti and Casanova, who have argued that the distribution of literary prestige within the global field parallels the distribution of economic power within the world-system. Metropolitan literary traditions occupy the core of the global literary field and set the standards of literary value that peripheral traditions are measured against. Peripheral literary traditions occupy a subordinate position from which they can access global recognition only by meeting the standards set by the metropolitan core.

For Bengali literary culture, this framework illuminates several important dynamics. The position of Bengali literary culture within the global literary field is not merely peripheral but is specifically shaped by the history of British colonial domination and the continuing asymmetries of postcolonial economic and cultural relations. The mechanisms through which Bengali literary works are recognized within the global literary field, primarily through translation into English and publication by metropolitan publishers, are themselves mechanisms of unequal exchange that appropriate the cultural production of the periphery on terms set by the metropolitan core.

9.2 Samir Amin and Unequal Development: Cultural Implications

Samir Amin, the Egyptian-French economist whose work on unequal exchange and cultural imperialism has been a major influence on the Centre for Marxian Studies at Jadavpur University, developed a framework for understanding the cultural dimensions of capitalist underdevelopment that is directly relevant to our analysis. Amin's concept of "cultural alienation," the process by which the cultures of peripheral societies are devalued and displaced by the culture of the metropolitan center in the context of capitalist integration, provides a theoretical framework for understanding the specific challenges that Bengali literary culture faces in the contemporary global cultural economy.

For Amin, cultural alienation was not merely a side-effect of economic underdevelopment but a constitutive dimension of the process of underdevelopment itself. The devaluation of the cultures of the periphery, the imposition of metropolitan cultural standards as universal norms of value and excellence, and the subordination of local cultural production to the demands of metropolitan

cultural markets, were all mechanisms through which the material and cultural dominance of the metropolitan center was reproduced and legitimized.

This analysis connects directly to the question of how the Bengali Marxian tradition understands its own position within the global intellectual field. The insistence on writing in Bengali, on publishing with left-wing Bengali publishers, on addressing a Bengali audience, and on developing analytical frameworks adequate to the specific conditions of Bengali cultural and political life, can be understood through Amin's framework as a form of cultural resistance to the imperialism of the global academic market. It is an assertion that Bengali cultural and intellectual production has value and significance that cannot be adequately measured by metropolitan standards, and that the genuine development of Bengali intellectual culture requires the cultivation of its own specific resources rather than the mimicry of metropolitan models.

9.3 The Drain of Wealth and the Drain of Intellectual Resources

Utsa Patnaik's research on the "drain of wealth" from India to Britain during the colonial period, which has estimated the total drain at approximately forty-five trillion dollars over the period of British rule, provides a framework for thinking about the material dimensions of colonial cultural domination that is relevant to our analysis. The drain of material wealth from India was accompanied by a drain of intellectual and cultural resources: the appropriation of Indian knowledge, the recruitment of Indian intellectuals into the service of colonial administration, and the imposition of colonial educational norms that devalued indigenous knowledge and privileged colonial forms of knowledge.

In the contemporary period, the equivalent process is what Bourdieu would call the drain of intellectual capital from the periphery to the core. The migration of highly trained Indian scholars and scientists to metropolitan universities, the recruitment of the most capable graduates of Indian universities into the global tech industry, and the pressure on Indian academics to publish in metropolitan journals rather than developing the intellectual infrastructure of Indian scholarship: all of these are mechanisms of intellectual drain that reproduce, in a new form, the colonial pattern of extracting the most valuable intellectual resources from the periphery for the benefit of the core.

For the Bengali Marxian tradition, this drain is a specific political and intellectual problem. The best graduates of Jadavpur University's Bengali department, those most capable of developing the tradition further, face constant pressure to migrate to metropolitan academic positions where their intellectual work will be more materially rewarded and more professionally recognized. The maintenance of the intellectual infrastructure necessary for genuine Bengali Marxian scholarship requires constant work against this centrifugal pull toward the metropolitan core.

CHAPTER TEN: ECOCRITICISM, DIGITAL HUMANITIES, AND THE FUTURE OF COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

10.1 Ecocriticism and the Bengali Environmental Tradition

Ecocriticism, the study of the relationship between literature and the natural environment, has emerged as one of the most important new fields in literary studies in the early twenty-first century. The climate crisis and the broader ecological crisis of the contemporary period have made the question of how literature represents and responds to the natural environment urgently significant, and ecocritical approaches have generated important new readings of literary traditions across the world.

For the Bengali literary tradition, the encounter with ecocritical frameworks offers both genuine opportunities and genuine challenges. The opportunity lies in the richness of the Bengali literary tradition's engagement with the natural environment: from Tagore's nature poetry, which represents one of the most extraordinary engagements with the natural world in modern literature, through Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay's extraordinary evocations of the natural landscape of Bengal in "Pather Panchali" and "Aranyak," to the tradition of Bengali folk literature and its deep embeddedness in the specific ecology of the Bengal delta, the Bengali literary tradition has resources for ecocritical analysis that are among the richest in world literature.

The challenge lies in the relationship between ecocritical approaches and the Marxian analytical framework that the Bengali tradition centrally employs. Classical Marxian theory has been criticized by some ecocritics for its anthropocentrism, its focus on human labor and human social relations at the expense of the non-human natural world, and its implicit assumption that the transformation of nature through human labor is the fundamental dynamic of historical development. These criticisms have been addressed by eco-Marxist thinkers including John Bellamy Foster, who has developed the concept of "metabolic rift," Marx's own ecological thinking in "Capital," and Jason Moore, who has argued for an understanding of capitalism as a way of organizing nature rather than merely a way of organizing human social relations.

The Bengali Marxian tradition has not systematically engaged with these eco-Marxist developments, and the integration of ecological analysis into the tradition's framework is one of the most important theoretical tasks facing the next generation of Bengali Marxian scholars. The specific ecological history of Bengal, the environmental dimensions of colonial exploitation, the relationship between the depletion of natural resources and the impoverishment of peasant communities, and the contemporary ecological crisis of the Bengal delta in the context of climate change: all of these are questions that the Bengali Marxian tradition has the intellectual resources to address and that the tradition's political commitments make it imperative to address.

10.2 Digital Humanities and the Bengali Archive

The digital humanities, understood as the application of computational methods to the analysis of literary and cultural texts and the development of digital archives and research tools, has become one of the most rapidly growing fields in the contemporary humanities. For the Bengali literary tradition, the digital humanities offer significant opportunities for the development of the scholarly infrastructure necessary for serious research and for the expansion of the audience for Bengali literary scholarship.

Digital archives of Bengali texts are being developed by institutions including the Bangla Academy in Dhaka, the Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan, and various digital humanities initiatives at Indian and Bangladeshi universities. The digitization of historical Bengali newspapers, including the political journals that figure centrally in Kafi's scholarship, would make these texts accessible to a much wider range of scholars and would create new possibilities for the kind of comparative historical analysis that Kafi's work exemplifies.

The computational analysis of Bengali literary texts, including the analysis of large corpora of Bengali literature for patterns of vocabulary, theme, and form, is also in its early stages of development. The application of distant reading methods to Bengali literary texts, while subject to the limitations that we have already discussed, could generate useful insights into the large-scale patterns of Bengali literary history that complement rather than replace the close reading methods that the Bengali Marxian tradition employs.

But the development of digital humanities methods for Bengali literary scholarship also raises important questions about the relationship between computational analysis and the kind of politically engaged, historically sensitive, close reading that the Bengali Marxian tradition practices at its best. The risk that the digital humanities will reproduce, in a new form, the same biases toward formally analyzable, quantitatively tractable, and technically legible dimensions of literary experience that Moretti's distant reading program already represents, is a real one that needs to be actively addressed.

10.3 Comparative Media Studies and the Analysis of Political Culture

The emergence of comparative media studies as a field that analyzes the relationship between different forms of media, literary, visual, digital, and the structures of political culture and consciousness offers new frameworks for understanding the kind of cultural analysis that Kafi's scholarship practices. Kafi's analysis of *Dhumketu*, *Raktakarobi*, and *Langol* as different media forms with different political functions is, in one sense, an early form of comparative media analysis: it attends to the specific material and formal properties of each medium and their relationship to the political functions that each medium is designed to perform.

The extension of this kind of analysis to contemporary forms of political media, including the social media platforms, online video channels, and digital communities through which political culture is organized in twenty-first-century India, is a genuinely important task for the development of the Bengali Marxian tradition. The question of how the specific analytical methods that Kafi applies to early twentieth-century political journalism can be adapted to the analysis of contemporary digital political culture is one that the next generation of Bengali Marxian scholars will need to address.

The broader question of what comparative media studies, as a theoretical framework, can contribute to Marxian cultural analysis is also worth addressing. The media studies tradition, drawing on the work of Marshall McLuhan, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, and more recently Henry Jenkins and Lev Manovich, has developed sophisticated analytical frameworks for understanding the relationship between the technical properties of media and their social and political consequences. The integration of these frameworks with the Marxian tradition's

emphasis on the class dimensions of cultural production and the political economy of the media industry offers possibilities for a more comprehensive analysis of contemporary political culture than either tradition can achieve alone.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE TAGORE-NAZRUL AXIS AND THE GLOBAL IMAGINATION OF BENGALI CULTURE

11.1 Tagore's Global Reception: What It Reveals and Conceals

The global reception of Rabindranath Tagore is one of the most important case studies in the politics of world literature and the mechanisms through which non-European literary traditions are selectively appropriated and represented within the global literary field. Tagore's Nobel Prize, as we have already noted, established Bengali literature as globally significant, but the specific form of his global recognition shaped the way Bengali culture was understood globally in ways that are both illuminating and misleading.

The Tagore who was globally received in the early twentieth century was primarily the Tagore of "Gitanjali" and the lyrical, mystical dimension of his work: the poet of devotion, of the longing for the infinite, of the relationship between the individual soul and the divine. This Tagore resonated with the spiritual searches of European modernist writers and readers who were dissatisfied with the materialism and rationalism of European civilization and who found in Indian philosophy and literature a counterweight to what they experienced as the spiritual poverty of the modern West.

But this global reception systematically obscured the political Tagore, the Tagore of Raktakarobi and "Nationalism" and "The Crisis in Civilization": the Tagore who was one of the most devastating critics of European imperialism and its claims to cultural superiority, who returned his British knighthood in protest against the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, who wrote plays that analyzed the dehumanization of industrial capitalism with extraordinary acuity, and who engaged in sustained and complex debates about the relationship between nationalism, internationalism, and the conditions for genuine human freedom.

The recovery of this political Tagore is one of the most important tasks of Bengali Marxian scholarship, and Kafi's analysis of Raktakarobi is a significant contribution to this recovery. By reading Raktakarobi as a political text that engages with the specific conditions of colonial capitalism, Kafi makes visible dimensions of Tagore's work that the dominant global reception has tended to obscure. This is not merely a scholarly exercise in the recovery of a neglected aspect of an already recognized literary tradition. It is a political intervention in the global reception of Bengali culture that challenges the specific form of that reception's appropriation of the Bengali tradition.

11.2 Nazrul Islam's Global Absence

The global absence of Nazrul Islam, in contrast to Tagore's global presence, is itself a significant fact that needs to be analyzed and understood. Nazrul, who is arguably the most important Bengali poet after Tagore and is certainly the most important figure in Bengali revolutionary culture, is almost completely unknown outside the Bengali-speaking world. His poetry has not been translated into European languages in any systematic way. He does not appear in the standard anthologies of world poetry. He is not a reference point in the global Marxian literary theory canon. And his significance as a figure who combined extraordinary aesthetic achievement with political commitment in the service of anti-colonial and anti-capitalist politics is simply not recognized within the global intellectual conversation.

This absence is not accidental. It reflects the specific mechanisms through which the global literary field distributes recognition and the specific ways in which those mechanisms disadvantage politically radical, vernacular-language poetry from formerly colonized societies. Nazrul's work is both formally complex, drawing on the resources of classical Urdu and Persian poetry as well as Bengali folk music and modern free verse, and politically radical in ways that do not translate easily into the frameworks of cultural appreciation that dominate the global literary market.

The recovery of Nazrul's significance for global Marxian literary thought is one of the most important contributions that the Bengali Marxian tradition can make to the global intellectual conversation. The analysis of how a poet of Nazrul's stature can be simultaneously celebrated within the Bengali-speaking world and completely invisible within the global literary field illuminates fundamental truths about the politics of world literature and the mechanisms of cultural imperialism that those politics express.

11.3 Bangladesh and the Partition of the Bengali Literary Tradition

The partition of Bengal in 1947 and the subsequent creation of Bangladesh in 1971 divided the Bengali literary and intellectual tradition in ways that have had significant consequences for the development of Bengali Marxian scholarship. The Department of Bengali at Jadavpur University's inclusion of Bangladeshi literature in its curriculum, as we noted in the earlier parts of this textbook, reflects a commitment to maintaining the integrity of the Bengali literary tradition across political borders. But the actual intellectual relationships between Bengali scholars on the two sides of the border are more complex and more difficult than this curricular commitment alone suggests.

Bengali Marxian scholarship in Bangladesh has developed in a different political context from its West Bengali counterpart. The independence struggle of 1971, in which Bengali nationalists fought against Pakistani military domination in one of the bloodiest conflicts of the twentieth century, shaped the political culture of Bangladesh in ways that gave the Bengali language and Bengali cultural identity a specifically nationalist charge that is different from the situation of Bengali in India, where it is one of many regional languages within a multilingual national framework.

The development of Bengali Marxian scholarship in Bangladesh has also been shaped by the specific political history of the country: the periods of military rule, the rise of Islamist politics,

the complex relationship between secular nationalism and religious identity, and the ongoing debates about the meaning of Bangladeshi national identity and its relationship to Bengali cultural identity. These are questions that West Bengali Marxian scholars like Kafi must engage with, because the full analysis of the Bengali literary and intellectual tradition requires attention to both sides of the border that partition created.

CHAPTER TWELVE: TOWARD A NEW COMPARATIVE FRAMEWORK: PROPOSALS AND PROSPECTS

12.1 The Inadequacy of Existing Frameworks

The preceding chapters of Part Eight have moved through a range of comparative frameworks and a range of comparative encounters, examining the Bengali Marxian tradition in relation to world literature theory, the global history of Marxian literary thought, Latin American, African, Arab, and Chinese traditions of politically engaged scholarship, the politics of translation, the debates about realism and formal experimentation, world-systems theory and its cultural implications, and the emerging fields of ecocriticism and digital humanities. What emerges from this comparative survey is both a richer understanding of the Bengali tradition's specific character and a recognition of the inadequacy of existing comparative frameworks to capture that character fully.

The existing frameworks of world literature theory, as developed by Goethe, Moretti, Casanova, Damrosch, and others, are inadequate because they reproduce the hierarchies of the global literary market and the cultural imperialism embedded in the metropolitan academy's power to define what counts as world literary significance. They cannot adequately account for the value of vernacular-language literary traditions that are not primarily oriented toward global circulation, and they tend to measure the significance of non-European traditions by their legibility within European aesthetic and intellectual frameworks.

The existing frameworks of comparative Marxian literary theory are also inadequate, not because they are theoretically mistaken but because they are not sufficiently attentive to the specific historical and cultural conditions of different national Marxian traditions. The theoretical frameworks developed within the European and North American Marxian traditions, however sophisticated, were developed in response to specific historical conditions that differ in important ways from the conditions that have shaped the Bengali Marxian tradition. The application of these frameworks to the Bengali tradition requires translation, adaptation, and in some cases fundamental rethinking.

12.2 Elements of a New Framework

What would a genuinely adequate comparative framework for understanding the global significance of the Bengali Marxian literary tradition look like? We propose the following elements, not as a complete and systematic alternative to existing frameworks but as contributions to the ongoing development of the comparative methodology.

First, such a framework would need to be genuinely multilingual in its commitments. It would need to engage seriously with primary texts in Bengali, and to recognize that the full significance of Bengali Marxian scholarship cannot be accessed through translated texts alone. This means that genuinely comparative engagement with the Bengali tradition requires language competence that most globally positioned scholars do not currently possess, and that developing such competence must be a priority for the development of the field.

Second, such a framework would need to be genuinely attentive to the specific historical and political conditions within which different national literary and intellectual traditions have developed. The "global" in "global comparative" framework must not mean the imposition of a single, metropolitan-generated framework on all national traditions, but the development of analytical tools adequate to the specific character of each tradition and capable of facilitating genuine comparison without imposing false equivalences.

Third, such a framework would need to take seriously the political economy of intellectual production, including the ways in which the global distribution of academic resources, the politics of translation, and the hierarchies of prestige and recognition within the global academy shape what kinds of scholarship are produced, recognized, and disseminated. The analysis of the Bengali Marxian tradition cannot be separated from the analysis of the conditions under which that tradition operates and the structural constraints that shape its development.

Fourth, such a framework would need to integrate the insights of multiple theoretical traditions, including not only the European and North American Marxian traditions but also the Latin American, African, and Asian traditions of politically engaged intellectual work, in a genuinely dialogical way that allows each tradition to challenge and enrich the others without any single tradition assuming a central, authoritative position.

12.3 The Bengali Contribution to Global Intellectual Debates

What, concretely, does the Bengali Marxian literary tradition have to contribute to the global intellectual debates about literature, culture, politics, and the conditions of human liberation in the early twenty-first century? We propose the following as the most important specific contributions.

The tradition offers a sustained and historically rich analysis of the relationship between colonial capitalism and cultural production that is neither reducible to metropolitan frameworks of analysis nor merely a local variant of a universal dynamic. The specific history of Bengal under British colonialism, the specific forms of cultural resistance and political struggle that this history generated, and the specific literary and intellectual tradition within which these struggles were expressed and analyzed, constitute a body of historical and theoretical knowledge that has no equivalent elsewhere and that illuminates dimensions of the global history of capitalism and colonialism that metropolitan frameworks consistently miss.

The tradition offers a model of how to combine rigorous theoretical analysis with genuine political commitment and with deep engagement with specific literary and cultural texts. In an intellectual landscape increasingly dominated by either purely technical scholarship that avoids

political engagement or purely political commentary that avoids theoretical rigor, the Bengali Marxian tradition's insistence on the possibility and the necessity of combining all three dimensions offers a genuinely valuable alternative.

The tradition offers specific analytical frameworks for understanding the relationship between different kinds of cultural production, including political journalism, theatrical performance, popular publishing, and literary fiction, that go beyond the conventional literary studies focus on canonical literary texts. Kafi's synthetic analysis of Dhumketu, Raktakarobi, and Langol as a constellation of related cultural forms is a methodological innovation with implications that extend well beyond the specific texts he analyzes.

The tradition offers a developed engagement with the specific question of how vernacular languages function as vehicles of political thought and cultural resistance in the context of colonial and postcolonial domination, an engagement that is directly relevant to the global debates about the politics of language in intellectual and cultural life.

And the tradition offers a living example of the possibility of maintaining serious Marxian scholarly work under conditions of political difficulty and institutional constraint, a possibility that is increasingly important to demonstrate as the global retreat of left politics and the rise of authoritarian nationalism in many parts of the world create conditions that test the resilience of critical intellectual traditions.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS TO PART EIGHT: THE LOCAL, THE GLOBAL, AND THE DIALECTIC OF COMPARISON

The twelve chapters of this Part have moved through a broad comparative landscape, situating Bengali Marxian literary scholarship within the global frameworks of world literature theory and comparative Marxian thought and examining its relationships with parallel traditions in Latin America, Africa, the Arab world, and China. We have attended to the politics of translation, the theory of realism, the implications of world-systems theory, and the emerging frameworks of ecocriticism and digital humanities. We have examined the global reception of Tagore and the global absence of Nazrul, and we have proposed elements of a new comparative framework adequate to the specific character and contribution of the Bengali tradition.

What emerges from this broad comparative engagement is a picture of the Bengali Marxian tradition as simultaneously deeply rooted in the specific history of Bengal and genuinely significant for global intellectual debates, as both a product of specific historical conditions that limit and shape its possibilities and a body of intellectual work that has achieved genuine insights that transcend its specific conditions of production. The dialectic of the local and the global, which is one of the central themes of the tradition itself, is thus also a feature of the tradition's own position within the global intellectual landscape.

The comparative analysis also reveals that the Bengali tradition is not alone in its project. The Latin American, African, and Arab Marxian traditions that we have examined share with the

Bengali tradition the fundamental commitment to developing analytical frameworks adequate to the specific conditions of societies shaped by colonial domination and capitalist underdevelopment, the insistence on the political significance of cultural production, and the refusal to measure intellectual achievement by metropolitan standards alone. The development of genuine intellectual solidarity among these traditions, the building of intellectual connections that are not mediated through metropolitan centers, is one of the most important tasks for the future development of globally engaged Marxian intellectual work in the early twenty-first century.

Abdul Kafi's work, and the tradition he represents, is a part of this larger global project. Its significance is not merely local, however deeply local its roots. It is a contribution to one of the most important intellectual conversations of our time: the conversation about how to understand and respond to the conditions of capitalist domination, colonial legacy, and human suffering that define the situation of the majority of the world's people in the early twenty-first century. This conversation needs many voices, and the Bengali voice, with its specific history, its specific resources, and its specific commitments, is among the most important.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Evaluate the major theoretical frameworks for world literature, including those of Moretti, Casanova, Damrosch, and Spivak, in terms of their adequacy for understanding the global position and significance of Bengali Marxian literary scholarship. Which framework is most adequate and why? What modifications or supplements to existing frameworks would a genuinely comprehensive theory of world literature require?
2. Compare the development of Marxian literary theory in Bengal with its development in Latin America, drawing on the specific figures and texts discussed in this Part. What are the most significant structural similarities between the two traditions? What are the most important differences, and what do those differences reveal about the relationship between intellectual tradition and historical context?
3. Analyze the politics of Tagore's global reception in terms of the mechanisms of world literary circulation discussed in this Part. What specific features of Tagore's work were most emphasized in the global reception, what features were most obscured, and why? What would a genuinely comprehensive global reception of Tagore's work need to include that the historical reception has omitted?
4. Examine Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's argument for writing in the vernacular in relation to Abdul Kafi's practice of writing in Bengali. What are the strongest arguments for and against this choice in the specific context of a Bengali academic intellectual in the twenty-first century? What is lost and what is gained by choosing to write in the vernacular rather than in English?
5. Analyze the relationship between world-systems theory, as developed by Wallerstein and elaborated by Amin, and the concept of the global literary field as developed by Casanova and Bourdieu. Are these frameworks compatible? What does the combination of economic and cultural world-systems analysis reveal about the position of Bengali literary culture in the contemporary global order?

6. Develop a comparative analysis of the realism debates in the European Marxian tradition with the specific forms that the question of literary realism has taken in the Bengali literary tradition. What specific forms of Bengali literary practice correspond to the major positions in the European realism debate, and what specifically Bengali dimensions of the question do those European frameworks fail to capture?
7. Assess the relevance of ecocritical frameworks for the analysis of Bengali literary texts, including the texts discussed in Kafi's major scholarly work. What specific ecocritical insights can be applied to these texts, and what modifications to existing ecocritical frameworks would be required to make them fully adequate to the specific conditions of Bengali literary culture and environmental history?
8. Analyze the political and cultural dimensions of the partition of the Bengali literary tradition between India and Bangladesh. What specific scholarly and intellectual challenges does this partition create for the development of Bengali Marxian literary scholarship? What institutional mechanisms and intellectual practices would most effectively address these challenges?
9. Examine the specific contribution that the Latin American concept of "magical realism" might make to the analysis of Bengali literary texts. Is there a comparable phenomenon in Bengali literary culture? If so, how might it be analyzed, and what does it reveal about the specific character of Bengali literary representation?
10. Develop a proposal for a genuinely multilingual, genuinely comparative scholarly project that would bring Bengali Marxian literary scholarship into sustained dialogue with one of the other national traditions discussed in this Part. What specific texts or questions would provide the most productive basis for such a dialogue? What institutional and linguistic barriers would need to be overcome, and how might they be overcome?
11. Analyze the implications of the digital humanities for the development of Bengali Marxian literary scholarship. What specific digital tools and resources would be most valuable for the advancement of this scholarship? What risks does the digital humanities movement pose for the kind of politically engaged, historically sensitive, close reading that the Bengali Marxian tradition practices?
12. Evaluate the argument that the Bengali Marxian literary tradition has genuine contributions to make to global intellectual debates about the relationship between culture, politics, and human liberation. What are the most important specific contributions? What barriers currently prevent these contributions from being recognized in the global intellectual conversation, and what strategies would most effectively address these barriers?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

On world literature theory: The essential texts are Pascale Casanova's "The World Republic of Letters," David Damrosch's "What Is World Literature," and Franco Moretti's "Distant Reading." Gayatri Spivak's "Death of a Discipline" provides the most important postcolonial critique. Aamir Mufti's "Forget English: Orientalisms and World Literatures" offers a rigorous analysis of the politics of the world literature concept. Emily Apter's "Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability" provides an important intervention in the translation debates.

On Latin American Marxian thought: Jose Carlos Mariategui's "Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality" is the foundational text. Roberto Fernandez Retamar's "Caliban and Other Essays" provides essential context for understanding the relationship between cultural identity and political struggle in the Latin American context. Enrique Dussel's "Philosophy of Liberation" offers the most systematic Latin American philosophical framework. Aime Cesaire's "Discourse on Colonialism" is essential for understanding the French Caribbean tradition.

On African Marxian literary thought: Ngugi wa Thiong'o's "Decolonising the Mind" is essential. Frantz Fanon's "The Wretched of the Earth" remains fundamental. Chinua Achebe's "Morning Yet on Creation Day" and "Hopes and Impediments" provide essential theoretical reflection on the African novel. Georg Gugelberger's edited volume "Marxism and African Literature" provides useful scholarly context.

On Chinese Marxian literary thought: Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" is the essential primary text. Bonnie McDougall's translation and analysis of this text provides important scholarly context. Lu Xun's essays, available in various English-language selections, provide essential context for understanding the Chinese revolutionary literary tradition. Marston Anderson's "The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period" provides the most important scholarly analysis.

On Arab Marxian literary thought: Mehdi Amel's works, not yet widely available in English translation, are the primary theoretical sources. Yassin al-Hafez's "The Defeat and the Defeated Ideology" is an important related text. Mahmoud Darwish's poetry is available in various English translations, including those by Ibrahim Muhawi and Fady Joudah.

On the politics of translation: Lawrence Venuti's "The Translator's Invisibility" is the essential text. Gayatri Spivak's essay "The Politics of Translation" in "Outside in the Teaching Machine" provides an important postcolonial perspective. Emily Apter's "The Translation Zone" provides a broad survey of the field. Walter Benjamin's essay "The Task of the Translator" remains philosophically fundamental.

On world-systems theory and culture: Immanuel Wallerstein's "The Modern World-System" (four volumes) provides the essential theoretical framework. Samir Amin's "Eurocentrism" and "Unequal Development" provide the most important applications to cultural and intellectual analysis. Giovanni Arrighi's "The Long Twentieth Century" provides essential context for understanding the current phase of world-systemic development. Vijay Prashad's "The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South" provides a valuable political history of the global South's intellectual and political development.

On eco-Marxism: John Bellamy Foster's "Marx's Ecology" provides the most important reconstruction of Marx's own ecological thinking. Jason Moore's "Capitalism in the Web of Life" provides the most ambitious recent attempt to develop a genuinely ecological Marxism. Andreas Malm's "Fossil Capital" provides an important analysis of the relationship between capitalism and the climate crisis. Amitav Ghosh's "The Great Derangement" provides an important literary perspective on the ecological crisis.

On Bengali literature in comparative perspective: Sukanta Chaudhuri's edited volume "Calcutta: The Living City" provides essential context for the urban dimension of Bengali literary culture. Meenakshi Mukherjee's "Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India" situates Bengali realism within the broader context of the Indian novel. Sukumar Sen's "History of Bengali Literature" provides the essential scholarly survey. For Tagore in global perspective, Rabindranath Tagore's "The Home and the World" and "Nationalism" are essential primary texts, and Amartya Sen's "The Argumentative Indian" provides an important engagement with Tagore's political and philosophical significance.

APPENDIX TO PART EIGHT: KEY CONCEPTS IN COMPARATIVE WORLD LITERATURE AND MARXIAN CULTURAL THEORY

CULTURAL IMPERIALISM: The process by which the cultures of dominant societies are imposed on or displace the cultures of subordinate societies through the mechanisms of colonial domination, neocolonial economic relations, and the global cultural market. Cultural imperialism operates not through direct coercion alone but through the naturalization of the values, standards, and frameworks of the dominant culture as universal and superior.

DEPENDENCY THEORY: A theory of global economic development, associated primarily with Latin American scholars including Andre Gunder Frank, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and Theotonio Dos Santos, that argues that the underdevelopment of peripheral societies is the direct product of their integration into the world capitalist system in a subordinate position. Dependency theory challenges the assumption that underdevelopment is a stage in a universal process of capitalist development and insists that it is a structural feature of the global capitalist system.

DISTANT READING: A term coined by Franco Moretti to describe the use of quantitative methods and large-scale comparative frameworks to analyze literary history without engaging in detail with any particular text. Distinguished from close reading, which involves sustained interpretive attention to specific texts.

MAGICAL REALISM: A literary mode, associated primarily with Latin American writers including Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Alejo Carpentier, in which supernatural or magical elements are presented as ordinary features of the narrative world. Often interpreted as a specific form of literary realism adequate to the specific social reality of Latin American societies, in which the boundaries between the everyday and the extraordinary are experienced differently than in European secular modernity.

METABOLIC RIFT: A concept developed by John Bellamy Foster, drawing on Marx's own analysis of the relationship between capitalism and nature, to describe the disruption of the natural metabolic relationship between humanity and the earth that capitalist production produces. The metabolic rift refers to the physical separation of the products of human labor from the natural cycles through which soil fertility and other natural resources are replenished.

NEGRITUDE: A literary and intellectual movement founded by Caribbean and African intellectuals in Paris in the 1930s, including Aime Cesaire, Leopold Sedar Senghor, and Leon-Gontran Damas, that asserted the value of African cultural identity as a response to the colonial devaluation of African cultures. Negritude combined cultural affirmation with political critique and was deeply influenced by both African American literature and Marxian political thought.

SEMIPERIPHERY: In Wallerstein's world-systems theory, the intermediate zone between the core and the periphery of the capitalist world-economy. Semiperipheral regions occupy a position of relative advantage over peripheral regions while remaining in a subordinate position relative to core regions. The semiperipheral position is both economically and politically significant.

STRUCTURES OF FEELING: A concept developed by Raymond Williams to describe the specific ways of experiencing and feeling that are characteristic of particular historical moments and that are expressed in the literary and cultural production of those moments. Structures of feeling are distinguished from explicit ideologies by their pre-articulate, experiential character: they register in cultural form the tensions and pressures of social change before those tensions are fully formulated as conscious beliefs.

UNTRANSLATABILITY: A concept in translation theory, developed by Emily Apter among others, that refers to the limits of translatability inherent in any linguistic and cultural expression: the dimensions of meaning, connotation, cultural reference, and linguistic form that resist or are lost in translation. Untranslatability is not merely a practical limitation but a theoretical concept that challenges the assumption of universal translatability underlying certain versions of world literature theory.

WELTLITERATUR: A German term coined by Goethe in 1827 to describe the literary culture that was beginning to emerge from the growing international circulation of literary works. The term is usually translated as "world literature" in English, but the translation conceals the specific Goethean sense of a literature that transcends national boundaries through processes of circulation and mutual influence.

WORLD-SYSTEM: Immanuel Wallerstein's term for the global capitalist economy understood as a single, hierarchically organized system rather than as a collection of separate national economies. The world-system is characterized by a division between core, semiperipheral, and peripheral zones that are integrated through mechanisms of unequal exchange in which core regions accumulate capital at the expense of peripheral ones.

Part Nine of this textbook will address: The Future of the Tradition: Abdul Kafi, the Next Generation, and the Political and Intellectual Challenges of Bengali Marxism in a Changing World.

End of Part Eight

A NOTE ON COMPARATIVE METHOD

Part Eight has employed a broadly comparative method that draws on multiple national traditions and theoretical frameworks without claiming to provide a complete or definitive comparative account. The comparative encounters discussed in this Part are necessarily selective: we have focused on those traditions that offer the most illuminating parallels and contrasts with the Bengali Marxian tradition and that are most accessible to analysis within the space available. Many other comparative encounters are possible and important: the South Korean minjung literary tradition, the South African black consciousness literary movement, the Turkish tradition of committed literature, the Italian neorealist tradition and its Gramscian theoretical foundations, among others, all offer significant comparative perspectives that a fuller treatment would need to engage.

The method of comparison employed in this Part is what might be called "productive juxtaposition" rather than systematic equivalence: the comparison is intended to illuminate specific features of the Bengali tradition by placing it alongside specific features of other traditions, not to claim that these traditions are equivalent or that they can be reduced to a single comparative schema. Comparison, in the sense employed here, is a form of critical illumination rather than a form of classificatory reduction.

The comparative analysis consistently maintains the conviction that the Bengali Marxian tradition is not a peripheral variant of a European original but a genuinely distinctive intellectual achievement with its own specific character, its own specific resources, and its own specific contributions to the global conversation about literature, culture, and political struggle. To understand these contributions requires both the external perspective of comparative analysis and the internal perspective of deep engagement with the tradition itself. Part Eight has attempted to provide the former; the preceding Parts of this textbook have provided the latter. Together, they aim to give the reader a rich and rounded understanding of what the Bengali Marxian tradition that Abdul Kafi represents means, both within its own historical context and within the larger world of ideas.

End of Part Eight

PART NINE: THE FUTURE OF THE TRADITION

Abdul Kafi, the Next Generation, and the Political and Intellectual Challenges of Bengali Marxism in a Changing World

PREFACE TO PART NINE

Part Eight of this textbook situated the work of Abdul Kafi and the Bengali Marxian literary tradition within a wide comparative frame, examining parallel movements in Latin American,

African, Chinese, and Arab intellectual traditions, and asking what contributions the Bengali tradition has made and can still make to the global conversation about culture, politics, and human emancipation. The comparative method employed in Part Eight was, as we said there, a method of productive juxtaposition rather than systematic equivalence: we placed the Bengali tradition alongside other traditions not to reduce them to a common formula but to illuminate specific features of the Bengali practice by contrast and analogy.

In Part Nine we shift the angle of vision. We turn from comparison to projection: from asking where the Bengali Marxian tradition has been and what it has achieved, to asking where it is going, what challenges it faces, and what intellectual resources are available to meet those challenges. This is a different kind of intellectual exercise, and it requires a different kind of honesty. To project into the future is always to speculate, always to risk being wrong. The landscape of ideas changes in ways that no one can fully predict. The political conjuncture shifts in ways that make yesterday's certainties look naive. The very categories through which we understand our situation are constantly being renegotiated, challenged, and revised by new events, new thinkers, and new demands.

And yet the attempt to think about the future of an intellectual tradition is not merely speculation. It is a form of responsible engagement with the present. To understand where a tradition is going requires understanding the forces that are currently shaping it, the problems that are pressing most urgently on its practitioners, the resources that are available for responding to those problems, and the institutional conditions within which the work of thinking and teaching and writing takes place. These are all things we can analyze with reasonable rigor, even if we cannot predict with certainty how the analysis will unfold in practice.

Part Nine is organized around several major themes. We begin with an analysis of the changing political and economic conjuncture in India and West Bengal, asking what new demands the present moment places on Marxian intellectual work. We then examine the institutional challenges facing Jadavpur University and the Department of Bengali in the current period, with specific attention to the pressures of neoliberal academic governance, the crisis of the humanities, the politics of language, and the ongoing question of minority intellectual inclusion. We devote a substantial chapter to examining the relationship between the Marxian tradition and the new social movements that have emerged in the twenty-first century: movements around gender, caste, ecology, and digital rights. We ask whether the Marxian framework, as practiced in the Bengali tradition, is adequate to these new realities, or whether it requires fundamental revision and expansion. We then examine the psychological dimensions of intellectual vocation under conditions of stress and precarity, asking what it means for scholars like Abdul Kafi to continue doing serious intellectual work under the pressures of a hostile political environment, an underfunded university system, and a public culture that increasingly rewards spectacle over substance. We devote a chapter to the question of pedagogy: what does it mean to teach Marxian literary criticism in the current moment, and how can the tradition be transmitted to new generations in ways that remain intellectually serious and politically vital? We examine the digital transformation of academic life and its implications for the Bengali Marxian tradition. And we conclude with a comprehensive assessment of the tradition's prospects, examining the forms of intellectual and political renewal that seem most promising and the obstacles that remain most formidable.

Throughout, we draw on the latest developments in Marxian theory, postcolonial studies, political philosophy, the sociology of knowledge, critical pedagogy, and the philosophy of language. We do so not as an exercise in theoretical display but as a genuine attempt to think through the most pressing questions facing the tradition at this moment in its history.

CHAPTER ONE: THE CONJUNCTURE AND ITS DEMANDS

The Historical Moment and What It Requires of Marxian Thought

1.1 Understanding the Conjuncture: A Gramscian Starting Point

The concept of the conjuncture is one of the most useful and most demanding in the Marxian theoretical vocabulary. It refers to the specific configuration of forces, tendencies, and contradictions that characterizes a particular historical moment: not the longue duree of structural tendencies, not the short duration of individual events, but the medium-term intersection of multiple historical processes that together create a specific set of challenges, possibilities, and constraints for political and intellectual work. The concept comes from Althusser's reading of Marx, but it was developed most richly by Stuart Hall and the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, particularly in their analysis of the rise of Thatcherism in Britain in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Hall's concept of conjunctural analysis insists that there is no general formula for revolutionary change or intellectual progress: each moment requires its own specific analysis, its own reading of the configuration of forces at play, and its own assessment of what kinds of intervention are possible and necessary.

For the Bengali Marxian tradition represented by Abdul Kafi and his colleagues and students, the conjuncture of the mid-2020s is defined by a set of intersecting processes that are both deeply troubling and genuinely complex. Understanding these processes is the first requirement of any serious thinking about the future of the tradition. We cannot simply project the concerns of the past onto a different present. We must analyze what is actually happening, in all its complexity and contradiction, before we can ask what intellectual resources are adequate to the moment.

The most prominent feature of the current Indian political conjuncture is the consolidation of Hindu nationalist power at the national level. The Bharatiya Janata Party and its affiliated network of organizations have, since 2014, systematically worked to transform the character of Indian public life in ways that directly challenge the secular, pluralist, Marxian intellectual tradition represented by Jadavpur University and scholars like Abdul Kafi. This transformation has operated on multiple levels simultaneously. At the level of state power, it has involved the restructuring of academic institutions, the revision of educational curricula, the appointment of ideologically aligned administrators to universities and cultural institutions, and the use of legal mechanisms to criminalize or marginalize dissenting voices. At the level of civil society, it has involved the promotion of a majoritarian nationalism that defines Muslim citizens as suspect, Bengali cultural traditions as subordinate to a Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan identity, and Marxist intellectuals as anti-national agents of foreign influence. At the level of everyday life, it has

created an atmosphere of intimidation and surveillance that affects academic freedom, freedom of expression, and the ordinary courage required to think and speak critically in public.

For Abdul Kafi specifically, this conjuncture is not abstract. As a Muslim Bengali Marxist intellectual working at a public university in West Bengal, he occupies a position of multiple marginality within the dominant nationalist framework. His religious identity, his political commitments, his scholarly values, his institutional location, and his pedagogical practice all place him in potential conflict with the dominant political project of the current period. The assault he suffered in 2019 was not unrelated to this broader atmosphere, even if its immediate causes were specific to a personal grievance. The broader culture of hostility to dissenting intellectuals, the normalization of violence as a political tool, and the weakening of institutional protections for academic freedom all create conditions in which individual scholars are more vulnerable to intimidation and attack.

And yet the political conjuncture is not simply one of unrelieved darkness. It is also, paradoxically, a moment of intellectual and political vitality. The rise of authoritarian nationalism has provoked new forms of resistance, new solidarities, and new intellectual energies. The student movements that have erupted at universities across India in the past decade, including at Jadavpur itself, represent a genuine democratic impulse that the Marxian tradition can engage with and learn from. The feminist movement, the anti-caste movement, and the ecology movement have all produced important new theoretical contributions that are in productive tension with the older Marxian frameworks. The global crisis of capitalism, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and by the deepening ecological catastrophe, has created new conditions for the reception of Marxian critique and new demands for Marxian analysis.

The task of conjunctural analysis, in the Gramscian sense, is to hold all of these contradictory elements together without collapsing them into a single narrative either of simple despair or of facile optimism. The Bengali Marxian tradition, at its best, has always been capable of this kind of complex, contradictory thinking. The question for Part Nine is whether it can sustain this capacity in the face of the specific pressures of the current moment.

1.2 Neoliberalism and the Crisis of the University

The most immediate institutional challenge facing Abdul Kafi and his colleagues is the transformation of the university under neoliberal academic governance. This is not a challenge unique to India: it is a global phenomenon that has restructured higher education across the world over the past four decades, with consequences that are particularly severe for the humanities and the social sciences, and particularly severe for politically engaged scholarship of the kind practiced in the Bengali Marxian tradition.

The essential character of neoliberal academic governance is the application of market logic to the university. This means measuring academic value in terms of metrics that are modeled on market performance: citation counts, impact factors, grant income, student enrollment numbers, employer satisfaction surveys, and international rankings. It means restructuring academic institutions on the model of the corporation, with professional managers wielding authority over

academic decisions and individual faculty members being evaluated as individual producers of measurable outputs rather than as members of a community of scholars engaged in shared intellectual work. It means treating students as consumers whose preferences should shape the curriculum, rather than as developing intellects whose understanding of their own needs may be less reliable than that of experienced teachers and scholars. And it means measuring the value of academic disciplines in terms of their contribution to economic productivity, rather than in terms of their contribution to human understanding, cultural life, or political emancipation.

For a discipline like Bengali literary studies, and for a scholarly approach like that practiced by Abdul Kafi, neoliberal academic governance poses threats that are both material and intellectual. The material threats are obvious: reduced funding for the humanities, increased pressure to attract external grants in a context where the humanities cannot compete with the sciences for grant income, the growth of precarious academic employment at the expense of permanent positions, and the constant pressure to justify the existence of humanities disciplines in terms of their economic utility. These material pressures are real and they are damaging. They create an environment in which serious, long-term, politically engaged intellectual work is increasingly difficult to sustain.

But the intellectual threats are equally serious, if less immediately visible. The imposition of metric-based evaluation systems on scholarly work is not merely an administrative inconvenience. It is a transformation of what counts as knowledge and what counts as intellectual value. When the value of a piece of scholarship is measured by how many times it has been cited in international academic journals, the implicit standard being applied is that of the dominant academic cultures that control those journals: primarily English-language, primarily Euro-American, primarily aligned with the research agendas of well-funded institutions in the global North. Bengali-language scholarship that engages with the specific concerns of Bengali intellectual life and addresses Bengali readers does not register in this metric system. It is rendered invisible, not because it is without value, but because the system of measurement is structured to measure only those forms of intellectual work that conform to the dominant model.

This is, as the educational philosopher Michael Sandel has argued in a related context, not merely an economic issue but a moral and philosophical one. It is a question about what we value and how we express our values through our institutional arrangements. The neoliberal university expresses a set of values that is fundamentally at odds with the values expressed by the Bengali Marxian tradition: it values individual competition over collective solidarity, measurable outputs over immeasurable understanding, market performance over political commitment, and technological innovation over humanistic wisdom. The conflict between these value systems is not a peripheral conflict. It goes to the heart of what the university is for and what intellectual life means.

The response to this challenge from within the tradition is not simply to resist neoliberal reforms as such, though resistance is certainly part of the story. It is also to develop and articulate an alternative account of what the university is for, what intellectual work means, and what kinds of value cannot be captured by market metrics. This is itself a philosophical and political task of the first importance, and it is one that the Bengali Marxian tradition is well equipped to undertake.

The tradition of Marxian critique of ideology, the analysis of the relationship between knowledge and power, the insistence on the social character of intellectual production: all of these resources are directly relevant to the critique of neoliberal academic governance and to the development of an alternative vision.

1.3 The Language Question in the Current Moment

The question of language sits at the intersection of the philosophical, the political, and the institutional in ways that are especially charged in the current Indian conjuncture. For Abdul Kafi and his colleagues in the Department of Bengali at Jadavpur University, the choice to write primarily in Bengali is not merely a personal or stylistic preference. It is a political stance with significant implications for the reach and reception of their work, and those implications have become more complex in the current moment.

At one level, the politics of Bengali as a language of scholarship has always involved the tension between vernacular rootedness and cosmopolitan reach. To write in Bengali is to write for a particular community of readers, to participate in a specific cultural tradition, to refuse the demand that serious intellectual work be conducted only in the languages of the global academic mainstream. This refusal has deep roots in the Bengali intellectual tradition, from Rabindranath Tagore's insistence on the expressive richness of Bengali as a philosophical and literary medium to the practice of contemporary scholars like Abdul Kafi who conduct their most important work in the vernacular. It is connected to what Ngugi wa Thiong'o has called the decolonization of the mind: the refusal to accept that one's own language is inadequate for the highest forms of intellectual expression.

But in the current Indian political conjuncture, the language question has acquired new dimensions that complicate this simple picture. The BJP government's promotion of Hindi as the national language and its ongoing effort to subordinate regional languages to a Hindi-dominant cultural framework creates a context in which the defense of Bengali as a language of serious intellectual work becomes simultaneously a defense of regional cultural identity against centralized cultural homogenization. The Bengali language is not simply an alternative to English as a medium of scholarly communication. In the current moment, it is also a form of resistance to the Hindi-ization of Indian cultural life, to the erasure of the specific literary and intellectual achievements of the Bengali tradition in the name of a homogeneous national culture defined in Hindu-Hindi terms.

For a Muslim Bengali intellectual like Abdul Kafi, this situation is especially complex. Bengali Muslim identity has historically been contested between the demands of Islamic universalism, Bengali cultural particularity, and Indian secular nationalism. In the current moment, all three of these identity formations are under pressure. The Hindu nationalist framework renders Muslim identity suspect within the Indian national framework. The BJP's promotion of Hindi threatens Bengali cultural particularity. And the Indian secular nationalist framework, which has historically offered a space for Muslim intellectuals within the broader national project, has been substantially weakened by the political ascendancy of the Hindu nationalist movement. The choice to write in Bengali, to teach Bengali literature, and to conduct Marxian cultural analysis in a Bengali institutional context is therefore, for Abdul Kafi, a choice that simultaneously

asserts several different forms of identity and commitment in the face of several different forms of pressure and threat.

From the philosophical perspective of the tradition, this situation calls for what we might describe, drawing on the vocabulary of Antonio Gramsci, as a war of position on the terrain of culture and language. Gramsci distinguished between the war of maneuver, in which revolutionary forces seek to seize state power in a direct frontal assault, and the war of position, in which the effort to transform society proceeds through the long, patient, contested work of building counter-hegemonic cultural institutions, practices, and forms of consciousness. In the current Indian conjuncture, where the direct challenge to Hindu nationalist state power is difficult and dangerous, the war of position on the terrain of language, culture, and intellectual life is not a secondary or consolatory activity. It is the primary site of meaningful political and intellectual struggle. To maintain the Bengali language as a medium of serious Marxian intellectual work, to sustain the institutional infrastructure of the Bengali department and the Centre for Marxian Studies, to continue teaching generations of students to read and think critically within the Bengali literary tradition, is to conduct this war of position, even if it does not call itself by that name.

1.4 The Challenge of Caste and the Limits of the Classical Marxian Framework

One of the most important intellectual challenges facing the Bengali Marxian tradition in the current moment is the challenge posed by the anti-caste movement and by Ambedkarite thought to the adequacy of the classical Marxian framework for understanding Indian society. This challenge is not new: it has been present in Indian intellectual life since at least the 1930s, when B.R. Ambedkar and M.N. Roy represented two different Marxian-influenced responses to the question of caste. But it has acquired new urgency and new theoretical sophistication in the current moment, and it demands a serious response from scholars working in the Bengali Marxian tradition.

The Marxian framework, as classically formulated, understands social inequality primarily in terms of class: the relationship of individuals and groups to the means of production. Caste, in this framework, is understood as a form of superstructural ideology that serves the economic base, maintaining the exploitability of the lower castes by naturalizing their subordination and dividing the working class against itself. The political implication of this analysis is that the overcoming of caste requires the overcoming of the class relations that sustain it: once the economic foundations of caste-based exploitation are abolished through socialist revolution, caste itself will wither away as an ideology that has lost its material basis.

This framework has been challenged from multiple directions by Ambedkarite thought and by the scholarship it has inspired. The most fundamental challenge is the argument that caste is not simply a superstructural effect of class relations but an independent system of domination with its own logic, its own history, and its own forms of violence and exploitation that cannot be reduced to economic exploitation alone. The argument, associated with scholars like Kancha Ilaiah, Gopal Guru, and Sukhdeo Thorat, is that the experience of untouchability, of systematic social exclusion, of ritual pollution and degradation, cannot be fully captured by the category of economic exploitation. It requires categories of its own: categories that take seriously the specific

forms of psychological violence, social death, and cultural degradation that the caste system imposes on those at its bottom.

The implications of this challenge for the Bengali Marxian tradition are significant. Bengali intellectual culture has historically been dominated by upper-caste Hindu intellectuals, and even the Marxian wing of that tradition has not always been fully sensitive to the specific dimensions of caste-based oppression that go beyond class exploitation. The progressive literary tradition of the 1930s and 1940s, for all its genuine radicalism on questions of class and gender, had significant limitations in its engagement with caste. The Communist Party of India, in Bengal as elsewhere, prioritized class struggle and tended to treat caste as secondary or derivative. Even the most sophisticated Bengali Marxian literary critics, including those whom Abdul Kafi engages with in his work, have not always given adequate attention to the specifically caste-based dimensions of the social reality they analyze.

This is not merely a political criticism. It is an intellectual one. The adequacy of any analytical framework is measured by its ability to account for the actual complexity of the phenomena it analyzes. If the Bengali Marxian framework, as currently practiced, cannot fully account for the reality of caste as a system of domination irreducible to class, then it needs to be expanded and enriched. This does not necessarily mean abandoning the Marxian framework: it means developing it in dialogue with Ambedkarite thought and with the rich body of scholarly work on caste that has been produced in India and internationally over the past three decades. The concept of intersectionality, developed in the feminist and critical race traditions, offers one model for how this expansion might proceed: by understanding how caste, class, gender, and religion intersect to produce specific forms of oppression that cannot be fully analyzed by attending to any single dimension alone.

For Abdul Kafi's work specifically, this challenge invites a re-reading of the texts he has analyzed in his major published work. *Raktakarobi*, *Langol*, and *Dhumketu* are all texts that engage with questions of social oppression, political resistance, and human liberation. But to what extent do they engage with the specific forms of caste-based oppression that structure Bengali and Indian society? To what extent does a Marxian reading of these texts illuminate their engagement with caste, and to what extent does it occlude it? These are questions that the next generation of scholars working in the tradition needs to address, and addressing them will require the kind of intellectual courage and self-criticism that the tradition, at its best, has always been capable of.

CHAPTER TWO: INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES AND THE QUESTION OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM

The University Under Pressure, the Scholar as Subject

2.1 The Political Economy of Knowledge in Contemporary India

To understand the institutional challenges facing Abdul Kafi and his colleagues at Jadavpur University, we need to situate those challenges within the broader political economy of knowledge production in contemporary India. This requires understanding how the Indian state relates to the university, how funding structures shape research agendas, how regulatory frameworks constrain academic autonomy, and how the specific politics of the current government has affected the institutional landscape of higher education.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) remains the primary regulatory authority for universities in India, and its policies have significant implications for the autonomy of institutions like Jadavpur. The period since 2014 has seen a series of UGC initiatives that have raised concerns among academics about academic freedom, curricular autonomy, and the independence of university governance. The promotion of the National Education Policy 2020, with its emphasis on vocational training, its restructuring of undergraduate degree programs, its promotion of technology-mediated learning, and its downgrading of the humanities, represents a significant transformation of the institutional environment within which scholarly work like Abdul Kafi's is conducted. The NEP 2020, in its emphasis on multidisciplinary education and its flexibility in curricular design, has aspects that could be read as progressive. But its broader framework, with its emphasis on skill development and economic utility over humanistic education, reflects the neoliberal vision of the university that we discussed in the previous chapter.

For the Department of Bengali at Jadavpur University specifically, the NEP 2020 raises particular challenges. The department's strength has always rested on its ability to conduct deep, intensive study of Bengali language and literature within a framework that takes the discipline seriously in its own right. The restructuring of undergraduate education under the NEP framework, with its emphasis on credit hours, elective courses, and institutional transfer, threatens to dilute the intensity of literary education and to reduce the study of Bengali to a series of modular components that can be mixed and matched with courses from other departments. The intellectual coherence of a literary education that is grounded in sustained engagement with a specific cultural tradition is not easily preserved within a credit-based system designed for maximum curricular flexibility.

At the same time, Jadavpur University has historically been more resistant than most Indian universities to the imposition of external regulatory frameworks on its internal governance. The institution's tradition of political engagement, its strong faculty union, its culture of academic democracy, and its record of student and faculty activism have all contributed to a degree of institutional resilience that has allowed it to maintain its distinctive intellectual character even in the face of significant external pressures. The question for the current moment is whether this resilience can be sustained as the pressures intensify.

2.2 The Assault of 2019 and Its Broader Significance

We have already mentioned the assault on Abdul Kafi by a former student in 2019. It is worth returning to this episode and examining its significance more carefully, not as a sensational incident but as an event that illuminates important dimensions of the social and institutional environment within which academic work in India takes place.

The basic facts, as reported across multiple news sources, are as follows. In July 2019, a former student of the Bengali department at Jadavpur University, Rajesh Santra, who had graduated in 2015 and had been stalking and threatening Abdul Kafi for some time, attacked the professor physically near the main gate of the university while Kafi was having tea in the afternoon. Santra struck Kafi repeatedly, causing him to fall to the ground. He was restrained by students and bystanders and taken to the university's administrative building. He subsequently told university authorities that he had grievances against Kafi, alleging that Kafi had "discriminated" against him during his time as a student. Santra was arrested by police.

The Jadavpur University Teachers' Association responded strongly to the attack. The general secretary of the association, Partha Pratim Roy, stated that strict action was required against Santra, who had been stalking Kafi for a long time. The Vice-Chancellor, Suranjan Das, stated that the university had informed police and would take a stern view of such incidents.

This episode is significant in several ways. First, it illustrates the specific vulnerability of individual scholars who hold positions of authority in contexts where student grievances, real or perceived, can erupt into physical violence. The relationship between teachers and students in the Indian university is complex and often fraught: it is shaped by power differentials, by the high stakes of academic evaluation in a context of intense competition for educational credentials and employment, and by the emotional intensity of the intellectual relationship itself. When these dynamics become pathological, as they did in the case of Rajesh Santra, the consequences can be violent. That Abdul Kafi had been stalked and threatened before the attack means that this was not a sudden eruption of irrational violence but a prolonged pattern of threatening behavior that the university's institutional structures failed to address adequately before it escalated to physical assault.

Second, the episode illustrates the specific vulnerability of minority scholars in the current Indian political environment. We cannot know from public record whether Santra's grievances against Kafi were shaped by his religious identity, by his political commitments, or simply by personal resentment. But we can observe that the normalization of violence against dissenting intellectuals in the current political climate creates a context in which individual scholars from minority communities are more vulnerable to intimidation and attack. The culture of majoritarian aggression promoted by the Hindu nationalist movement is not confined to formal political contexts. It permeates everyday social relations, including the relations of academic life.

Third, the episode raises fundamental questions about the institutional responsibility to protect scholars who face threats to their safety. Universities are not merely intellectual spaces: they are social institutions with obligations to the physical safety of their members. The fact that Santra had been stalking and threatening Kafi for some time before the actual assault suggests that the university's institutional response to the threats was inadequate. This raises questions about what institutional mechanisms are available for protecting scholars who face such threats, and what improvements in those mechanisms are necessary.

From the perspective of intellectual history, the vulnerability of scholars to violence from those who resent their intellectual authority is not a new phenomenon. From Socrates to Antonio Gramsci to Ngo Thi Huong, the scholar who speaks truth to power has always faced the risk of

violent retribution. But in the specific context of contemporary India, and in the specific position of Abdul Kafi, this vulnerability takes on a particular urgency that the tradition needs to think about honestly and seriously.

2.3 The Rights and Protections of the Academic Intellectual

The question of academic freedom is not simply a question of institutional policy. It is a question with deep philosophical and legal dimensions that connect to fundamental issues in political philosophy about the relationship between the individual, the institution, and the state. To understand what academic freedom means, why it matters, and how it should be protected, we need to examine its philosophical foundations more carefully than is usual in discussions of the topic.

The philosophical case for academic freedom rests ultimately on the social value of free inquiry. The argument, in its most general form, is that the pursuit of knowledge requires freedom from external constraint, both because truth cannot be determined by authority and because the social benefits of free inquiry exceed the costs of protecting it even in cases where the inquiry produces uncomfortable results. This argument has roots in John Stuart Mill's defense of freedom of expression in "On Liberty," in the Kantian idea of the public use of reason, and in John Dewey's pragmatist account of inquiry as a social process. But it has been developed in specifically academic contexts by a range of philosophers and legal scholars who have argued that the university occupies a distinctive institutional position in liberal democratic societies: it is the primary site of free inquiry, and its freedom from external control is therefore a precondition not merely of scholarly progress but of democratic citizenship itself.

The legal framework for academic freedom in India is grounded in Article 19 of the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech and expression, and in the general framework of fundamental rights that the Constitution provides. But the practical protection of academic freedom depends not only on constitutional guarantees but on the specific institutional mechanisms through which those guarantees are enforced: university statutes, faculty governance structures, tenure systems, professional associations, and the culture of mutual protection that academic communities develop to defend their members against external threats.

For Abdul Kafi and his colleagues, the practical question of academic freedom is inseparable from the question of institutional power. The independence of the university from state interference, the strength of faculty governance structures, the effectiveness of the teachers' association in defending academic rights, the quality of the legal protections available to scholars who face threats: all of these institutional dimensions determine whether the constitutional guarantee of freedom of expression translates into actual protection for individual scholars in their daily work.

The current moment is one in which many of these institutional protections are under pressure. The government's tendency to appoint ideologically aligned administrators to universities, to use regulatory mechanisms to discipline institutions that do not conform to its political agenda, and to deploy legal instruments against scholars and activists who speak critically about its policies, all represent challenges to the practical reality of academic freedom that cannot be addressed by

appeals to constitutional guarantees alone. What is required, in addition to the defense of constitutional principles, is the strengthening of the institutional, professional, and cultural mechanisms that translate those principles into practical protection for individual scholars.

CHAPTER THREE: THE NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THE MARXIAN TRADITION

Gender, Caste, Ecology, and Digital Rights in Dialogue with Classical Frameworks

3.1 The Feminist Challenge and the Bengali Marxian Response

The relationship between Marxism and feminism is one of the most important and most contested intellectual questions in the history of the left. From the early debates between August Bebel and Clara Zetkin in the Second International to the socialist feminist debates of the 1970s and 1980s to the intersectional feminist theory of the current moment, the question of how to understand the relationship between gender oppression and class exploitation has generated a rich and complex body of theoretical work that the Bengali Marxian tradition needs to engage with seriously if it is to remain intellectually adequate to the present.

The Bengali intellectual tradition has a complex history with respect to gender. Rabindranath Tagore was, by the standards of his time, a progressive on questions of gender: his fiction explored the inner lives of women with unusual empathy and sophistication, and his critiques of the social restrictions imposed on Bengali women were genuine and important. The Progressive Writers' Association included women writers whose work engaged with gender as a dimension of social oppression: Ismat Chughtai, Rashid Jahan, and others broke important taboos in their fictional explorations of women's experience. Mahasweta Devi, one of the most significant Bengali writers of the twentieth century, made the intersections of gender, caste, and class the central concern of her fiction, producing work of extraordinary political and literary power that has influenced generations of scholars and activists.

And yet the Bengali Marxian tradition, like the Marxian tradition more generally, has sometimes reduced gender to a secondary or derivative dimension of class struggle, treating women's liberation as something that would follow automatically from socialist revolution rather than as a struggle that needed to be conducted simultaneously on its own terrain. This tendency has been challenged by feminist scholars within the tradition, including figures like Malini Bhattacharya, who has been a participant in the Centre for Marxian Studies at Jadavpur, and whose work brings Marxian analysis into dialogue with feminist theory in ways that challenge the subordination of gender to class.

The most significant recent theoretical development in feminist theory relevant to the Bengali Marxian tradition is the emergence of social reproduction theory as a framework for understanding the relationship between gender, labor, and capital. Social reproduction theory, associated with scholars like Tithi Bhattacharya, Silvia Federici, and Nancy Fraser, argues that capitalism depends not only on the exploitation of wage labor in the formal economy but on the

unpaid reproductive labor performed primarily by women in the domestic sphere: the bearing and raising of children, the maintenance of households, the emotional and caring labor that sustains the workforce. This reproductive labor is not marginal to capitalism but foundational to it: without it, the labor power that capitalism exploits could not be produced and reproduced from one generation to the next. The understanding of capitalism's exploitation of women, in this framework, requires not simply adding gender to class analysis but rethinking the entire relationship between production and reproduction, between the formal economy and the domestic sphere, between wage labor and unpaid care work.

For the Bengali Marxian tradition, social reproduction theory offers both a challenge and an enrichment. The challenge is to revise the classical Marxian framework in ways that take the reproductive sphere seriously as a site of exploitation and resistance. The enrichment is a significantly expanded understanding of what capitalism is and how it works, one that illuminates dimensions of Bengali social reality that the classical framework tended to obscure. The enormous amount of unpaid domestic labor performed by women in Bengali households, the specific forms of gender-based oppression that structure Bengali family life, the particular vulnerabilities of working-class and poor women in an economy that depends on their unpaid labor while refusing to recognize or compensate it: all of these realities become more visible and more analyzable through the lens of social reproduction theory.

The implications for literary criticism are equally significant. A social reproduction framework for reading Bengali literature would attend not only to the representation of class struggle in the formal sphere of production but to the representation of reproductive labor, domestic life, and the specific experiences of women as mothers, wives, caregivers, and domestic workers. It would ask new questions of texts that the Marxian tradition has already canonized, and it would bring new texts into critical visibility by asking what they reveal about the reproductive dimensions of capitalist exploitation in the Bengali social formation.

3.2 Ecology and the Metabolic Question

The ecological crisis of the twenty-first century represents perhaps the most fundamental challenge to the Marxian tradition as a whole. The crisis is fundamental not merely because it is severe, but because it raises questions about the basic assumptions of the tradition: assumptions about the relationship between humanity and nature, about the meaning of progress, and about the possibility of socialist development on the model imagined by classical Marxism.

The relationship between Marxism and ecology has been a subject of intense scholarly debate since the 1970s, when the environmental movement first forced serious engagement with ecological questions on the left. For decades, the dominant view was that Marxism and ecology were fundamentally at odds: that Marx's vision of socialist production was essentially Promethean, committed to the unlimited development of productive forces in ways that are incompatible with ecological sustainability. This view was challenged by John Bellamy Foster's pathbreaking scholarship in the 1990s and 2000s, particularly his book on Marx's ecology, which argued that Marx had a sophisticated understanding of the metabolic relationship between human society and nature, and that this understanding provides a foundation for an ecological Marxism that is both theoretically coherent and politically adequate.

Foster's concept of the metabolic rift, which he drew from Marx's analysis of the relationship between capitalist agriculture and the natural cycles through which soil fertility is maintained, describes the disruption of the natural metabolic relationship between human society and the natural world that capitalist production produces. When food and fiber produced on the land are transported to distant urban centers, the organic material that nature uses to replenish soil fertility is converted into waste and pollution rather than being returned to the land. This metabolic rift, which originated in the capitalist transformation of agriculture in the nineteenth century, has been extended and deepened by the fossil fuel economy of the twentieth century into a global ecological catastrophe that now threatens the conditions of human existence on earth.

For the Bengali Marxian tradition, the ecological question is not abstract. Bengal is one of the regions of the world most severely affected by climate change, and the ecological dimensions of Bengal's social reality are immediately and urgently present in the lives of ordinary Bengalis. The Bay of Bengal is rising, threatening to inundate vast areas of coastal Bengal and Bangladesh. The Sundarbans, the extraordinary mangrove ecosystem that provides both ecological services and livelihoods to millions of people in the delta region, is under severe threat from saltwater intrusion, storm surges, and the destruction of the mangrove forest. The rivers of Bengal, which have shaped the culture and economy of the region for millennia, are increasingly degraded by pollution, sedimentation, and the disruption of natural flow regimes. And the agricultural heartland of Bengal is under threat from the combination of erratic monsoon patterns, groundwater depletion, and the increasing frequency and severity of cyclones and floods.

The literary tradition that Abdul Kafi engages with in his scholarship has always been deeply attentive to the natural world of Bengal. From the river imagery of Tagore to the rural landscapes of Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay to the documentary naturalism of Mahasweta Devi's writing about forest-dwelling communities, Bengali literature has maintained a sustained engagement with the natural environment that provides important resources for an ecological reading of the tradition. An ecological Marxian literary criticism would bring these resources into dialogue with contemporary ecological theory, asking what the literary tradition reveals about the historical relationship between Bengali society and its natural environment, how capitalist development has transformed that relationship, and what forms of ecological imagination and resistance Bengali literature has produced.

This is a genuinely new dimension of the Marxian literary critical project, and it is one that the tradition needs to develop urgently given the severity of the ecological crisis. It requires not only the application of ecological concepts to literary texts but the development of new critical frameworks that can make visible the ecological dimensions of literary representations that have hitherto been read primarily in social and political terms. A poem by Jibanananda Das that describes the landscape of Bengal with extraordinary sensory richness can be read as an expression of lyric subjectivity, as a meditation on Bengali identity, or as an ecological document that records the specific features of a natural world that is now under severe threat. All three readings are legitimate and illuminating, and the ecological reading adds a dimension of urgency that the other two do not fully capture.

3.3 The Anti-Caste Movement and the Theory of Annihilation

We have already noted the challenge that the anti-caste movement poses to the adequacy of the classical Marxian framework. Here we want to develop this point further by examining the specific theoretical contributions of Ambedkarite thought and asking how those contributions might be integrated into or brought into productive dialogue with the Bengali Marxian tradition.

Ambedkar's theoretical contribution to the analysis of Indian society is more profound than is often recognized in the Marxian tradition. His analysis of caste, most fully developed in his essay "Annihilation of Caste," published in 1936, is not simply a description of the caste system or a political argument for its abolition. It is a fundamental critique of the ideological foundations of Hinduism and a radical argument about the relationship between religion, social organization, and political power. Ambedkar's argument is that caste cannot be abolished by economic reform alone, because caste is not fundamentally an economic system: it is a religious system, grounded in the Hindu sacred texts and legitimized by the authority of the Brahminical priestly class. The abolition of caste therefore requires the destruction of the religious foundation on which it rests, including the authority of the sacred texts that sanction it.

This is a radical argument, and it has been deeply controversial within the Indian left. The Marxian response to Ambedkar has historically been that his religious critique, while not without validity, misidentifies the ultimate foundation of caste. For the Marxian analysis, the ultimate foundation of caste is economic: caste serves the function of maintaining a specifically Indian form of labor exploitation in which the lower castes are locked into particular occupations and prevented from achieving the kind of social mobility that might allow them to challenge the economic power of the upper castes. The religious legitimization of caste is, in this analysis, a superstructural phenomenon that serves the economic base but is not its ultimate foundation.

The debate between these two analytical frameworks has been one of the most important in the history of Indian political thought, and it has not been resolved. But the productive way to understand the relationship between them is not as a binary opposition in which one must be right and the other wrong, but as a genuine intellectual tension that reveals important features of the social reality they are both trying to understand. Caste is simultaneously an economic system, a social system, a cultural system, and a religious system, and its analysis requires frameworks that can account for all of these dimensions and their interactions. Neither Ambedkar's primarily religious critique nor Marx's primarily economic framework is fully adequate on its own. What is needed is a framework that can hold both dimensions together without reducing either to the other.

For the Bengali Marxian tradition, this means developing a genuinely intersectional analysis of the relationship between caste and class in Bengali society, one that takes seriously both the economic dimensions of caste-based exploitation and the specific cultural and religious dimensions of caste-based humiliation and social death that the Ambedkarite tradition has illuminated. It also means engaging honestly with the history of caste within the Bengali left itself, including the ways in which upper-caste dominance has shaped the Bengali Marxian tradition and limited its engagement with the perspectives and experiences of lower-caste Bengalis.

This is not a comfortable intellectual task, but it is a necessary one. The tradition cannot claim to represent the interests of the oppressed in general while ignoring the specific forms of oppression experienced by Dalit and lower-caste communities. And it cannot develop an adequate analysis of Bengali social reality while treating caste as a peripheral issue rather than a central structural feature of that reality.

3.4 Digital Rights and the New Enclosures

The digital transformation of contemporary life has created a new set of political and philosophical challenges that the Marxian tradition has only begun to address systematically. For the Bengali Marxian tradition specifically, these challenges are both theoretical and practical, and they connect in important ways to the older debates about technology, labor, and capitalist development that have been central to the tradition since Marx's own analysis of machinery and large-scale industry in *Capital*.

The most fundamental issue is the question of what the digital economy has done to the relationship between labor and capital. The massive growth of digital platforms like Google, Facebook, Amazon, and their Indian equivalents has created new forms of value extraction that do not fit neatly into the classical Marxian framework of exploitation through the extraction of surplus value from wage labor. On these platforms, value is extracted from the users of the platform rather than from wage workers: the user produces data through their online activity, and the platform extracts value from that data by selling it to advertisers or using it to improve the platform's services and competitive position. This is what Shoshana Zuboff has called surveillance capitalism: a form of capitalism in which the raw material of production is not the labor power of workers but the behavioral data of users, and in which the product is not a commodity sold on the market but a prediction product sold to advertisers.

The Marxian concept of primitive accumulation, which Marx used to describe the historical process by which the peasantry was dispossessed of the commons and forced into the labor market, has been extended by scholars like David Harvey to describe the ongoing process of enclosure by which capital colonizes previously non-commodified areas of social life. The digital enclosure of information, knowledge, and social relations represents a new phase of this process: the commons of the internet, which briefly appeared as a genuinely open space for information sharing and democratic communication, has been enclosed by the platform corporations and converted into a site of value extraction. The data produced by the social interactions of billions of users has become raw material for capitalist production, extracted without compensation from those who produce it.

For the Bengali Marxian tradition, these developments raise several important questions. First, what do they mean for the theory of exploitation and surplus value? Does the extraction of value from user data represent a new form of exploitation that requires new theoretical categories, or can it be analyzed adequately within the existing Marxian framework? Second, what do they mean for the politics of information and knowledge? The digitalization of scholarship, the growth of open-access publishing, the emergence of digital archives of Bengali literature and culture: all of these developments create new possibilities for the dissemination of knowledge and new challenges for the traditional gatekeeping functions of academic institutions and

publishers. Third, what do they mean for the relationship between the digital economy and the political economy of India specifically? The rapid growth of India's digital economy, the importance of the IT sector, the massive expansion of mobile internet access: all of these create new dimensions of inequality and new forms of capitalist development that the Bengali Marxian tradition needs to analyze.

The question of digital rights is also directly connected to the question of academic freedom. The monitoring of online communication by state agencies, the use of social media by both state and non-state actors to harass and intimidate scholars and activists, and the vulnerabilities created by the digitalization of academic life all create new dimensions of the threat to intellectual freedom that we discussed in the previous chapter. Scholars who write or speak critically about the government in online spaces are exposed to forms of harassment and surveillance that did not exist in the pre-digital era. The digital environment is not simply a more efficient version of the analog public sphere: it is a qualitatively different environment that creates new risks and new vulnerabilities for those who use it for political and intellectual expression.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF INTELLECTUAL VOCATION UNDER PRESSURE

Commitment, Resilience, and the Inner Life of the Committed Scholar

4.1 What Sustains Intellectual Work Under Conditions of Adversity

The question of what motivates and sustains serious intellectual work is not merely a psychological question. It is also a philosophical and ethical one that bears on the deepest questions about the meaning of intellectual vocation, the relationship between thinking and acting, and the sources of the commitment that keeps scholars working even when the conditions of their work are difficult, underfunded, politically hostile, and personally dangerous.

For Abdul Kafi, as for many scholars who work in traditions of committed intellectual practice, the sources of sustaining motivation are multiple and interwoven. There is the intrinsic intellectual interest of the work itself: the pleasure of deep engagement with texts, the excitement of intellectual discovery, the satisfaction of understanding something more fully than one understood it before. There is the sense of participation in a tradition larger than oneself: the awareness that one's work is part of a long conversation that began before one's own birth and will continue after one's death, that one is contributing to a collective intellectual project that has value beyond any individual contribution. There is the sense of political and social purpose: the conviction that one's intellectual work matters for the world, that understanding is not merely an end in itself but a means toward the transformation of the conditions under which people live. And there is the specific pleasure and responsibility of teaching: the relationship with students that is, for most committed scholars, one of the deepest and most rewarding dimensions of intellectual life.

Psychological research on what sustains commitment and motivation under conditions of adversity is relevant here, even if it must be applied with care to the specific context of academic intellectual work. The concept of psychological resilience, developed in the wake of trauma research by scholars like Ann Masten and Bessel van der Kolk, describes the capacity to maintain or recover adequate functioning in the face of significant adversity. Resilience, in this understanding, is not simply a personal trait: it is a relational and contextual phenomenon that depends on the availability of social support, on the presence of meaningful purpose, and on the institutional structures that provide resources and protection in times of difficulty.

For scholars working in conditions like those described in the previous chapters, the sources of resilience are often the same as the sources of motivation: the intellectual tradition they participate in, the professional community they belong to, the students they teach, and the sense of purpose that their political commitments provide. But resilience also requires specific psychological capacities: the ability to maintain perspective under pressure, to distinguish between what is within one's control and what is not, to process difficult experiences without being overwhelmed by them, and to maintain the inner freedom that is the precondition of genuine intellectual work even when external freedoms are constrained.

The Stoic philosophical tradition, which has enjoyed a significant contemporary revival in psychology and self-help culture, offers some relevant resources here, though it needs to be used with care in the context of committed Marxian scholarship. The Stoic distinction between what is "up to us" and what is not, the practice of focusing on what one can control while accepting what one cannot, the cultivation of inner equanimity in the face of external adversity: these are not passive accommodations to injustice but active strategies for maintaining the psychological conditions necessary for continuing intellectual and political work. The key is to use them not as substitutes for political resistance but as complements to it: to cultivate the inner resources that allow one to continue the work of resistance even when the external conditions are harsh.

The Bengali intellectual tradition has its own resources for thinking about these questions. The concept of "sadhana" in the Tagore tradition, of spiritual practice as the discipline of the inner life that is inseparable from creative and intellectual work, offers a framework for understanding how serious intellectual work requires not only technical skill and political commitment but a certain quality of inwardness, of attention, of discipline that sustains the capacity for deep engagement over a long career. Tagore's own practice of combining poetry, music, painting, philosophy, and pedagogy as aspects of a single unified vocation represents one model of this integrating inwardness, even if the specific content of Tagore's spiritual vision is far removed from Abdul Kafi's Marxian commitments.

4.2 The Identity Question: Being Muslim, Bengali, and Marxist at Once

The specific situation of a Muslim Bengali Marxist intellectual in twenty-first-century India raises psychological questions about identity, belonging, and the management of multiple and sometimes conflicting commitments that deserve careful examination. This is not a question that can be reduced to simple politics or simple psychology. It is a fundamentally philosophical question about what it means to be a person who is simultaneously committed to several

different communities, traditions, and intellectual projects that are not always in easy harmony with each other.

The Muslim intellectual in the Marxian tradition has always occupied a complex position. Classical Marxism, in its atheistic materialism, stands in apparent tension with the religious commitments of Islam. The Communist Party of India and the West Bengal left have historically been secular, which means in practice that religious identities have been treated as private matters irrelevant to the public world of political and intellectual engagement. But the relationship between religion and politics in contemporary India is not simply a matter of individual choice. The Hindu nationalist movement has made Muslim identity politically charged in ways that cannot be simply bracketed or privatized. To be Muslim in India in the 2020s is to be marked as suspect in the public discourse promoted by the dominant political movement, regardless of one's own political commitments or intellectual affiliations.

For Abdul Kafi, this means that his identity as a Muslim is not simply a private religious matter but a political fact that shapes his position within the institution, within the academic field, and within the broader public culture. This does not mean that his work is reducible to his religious identity: it clearly is not, and to reduce it in that way would be to reproduce exactly the kind of reductive identity politics that the Marxian tradition correctly rejects. But it does mean that his position as a Muslim intellectual in the Bengali Marxian tradition is a genuinely complex one that requires both intellectual honesty and personal courage.

The philosophical resources for thinking about this complexity come from multiple directions. The tradition of Islamic humanism, represented by thinkers like Averroes and Avicenna in the medieval period and by figures like Mohammed Iqbal and Ali Shariati in the modern period, offers a framework for understanding how serious intellectual engagement with the world can be sustained within a religious framework without being reduced to religious apologetics. The tradition of Muslim Marxism, represented by figures like Mehdi Amel in Lebanon and by the secular nationalist intellectuals of the Arab world who combined Marxian political analysis with Arab cultural identity, offers precedents for understanding how Marxian commitments and Muslim identity can coexist without either dissolving into the other.

But the most important resources are probably those available within the Bengali tradition itself. The history of Bengali Muslim intellectual life, from the reformist tradition of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and the cultural nationalism of figures like Kazi Abdul Wadud to the revolutionary humanism of Kazi Nazrul Islam and the secular socialism of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, represents a rich and complex engagement with exactly the questions of identity, religion, and political commitment that Abdul Kafi faces in the current moment. To understand this history is not simply an academic exercise. It is a resource for self-understanding and for the development of the intellectual and personal strategies needed to navigate the specific challenges of the current conjuncture.

4.3 Resilience as Theory and Practice

The concept of resilience has been used in psychology primarily to describe a property of individuals. But in the context of intellectual traditions and scholarly communities, resilience is

also a collective phenomenon. Traditions survive and are renewed not simply because individual scholars are personally resilient but because they have developed collective practices, institutional structures, and cultural resources that sustain intellectual work across generations and across periods of adversity.

The Bengali Marxian tradition has demonstrated remarkable resilience over its history. It has survived the collapse of the Soviet Union and the discrediting of actually existing socialism. It has survived the defeat of the CPI(M) government in West Bengal after thirty-four years in power. It has survived the rise of Hindu nationalism and the increasing political hostility to the kind of secular, pluralist, Marxian intellectual work that the tradition represents. The question is not simply whether it will survive the current challenges but how it will be transformed by them, what new forms it will take, and what resources it will develop in the process of responding to the pressures of the current moment.

Part of the answer lies in what we might call the pedagogical dimension of resilience: the ways in which the tradition is transmitted to new generations of scholars and students who will carry it forward. This is the subject of the next chapter, and we will discuss it at length there. But part of the answer also lies in the capacity of the tradition to continue developing theoretically: to engage honestly with the criticisms and challenges that the new social movements and the new intellectual currents present to it, to revise and expand its frameworks where necessary, and to maintain the quality of intellectual seriousness and political commitment that has always been its most important resource.

CHAPTER FIVE: PEDAGOGY, TRANSMISSION, AND THE NEXT GENERATION

How a Tradition Reproduces Itself and Why It Matters

5.1 Teaching as Philosophical Practice

The practice of teaching is not merely a professional activity. At its best, it is a form of philosophical practice: an engagement with the minds of students that requires the same qualities of attention, honesty, creativity, and care that the best intellectual work requires, and that aims at the same fundamental goal of understanding. For a scholar like Abdul Kafi, whose institutional role is that of teacher as much as that of researcher, the practice of teaching is inseparable from the broader project of intellectual life. It is not an interruption of research but a continuation of it by other means.

The philosophical tradition of thinking about education goes back, in the Western tradition, to Socrates, whose practice of philosophical dialogue was itself a form of teaching, and whose understanding of teaching as a kind of intellectual midwifery, helping students to give birth to ideas that are already present within them, has remained influential for two and a half millennia. In the Indian tradition, the concept of "guru-shishya parampara," the tradition of teacher-student relationship as a form of spiritual and intellectual transmission, represents a different but equally profound understanding of what teaching means and what responsibilities it carries.

For the Marxian tradition, the question of pedagogy has been central since the beginning. Marx's own practice of writing and political organization was simultaneously a pedagogical practice: the goal was not merely to analyze the world but to create in the minds of workers and activists the understanding necessary to transform it. Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual, the intellectual who emerges from within the working class and who educates that class in the understanding of its own situation and its own historical task, is fundamentally a pedagogical concept. Freire's concept of critical pedagogy, developed in the context of adult literacy education in Brazil, understands education as fundamentally a political practice: an engagement with students that either reproduces the dominant consciousness or challenges it in the direction of critical awareness and emancipatory action.

For Abdul Kafi, teaching Bengali literature within the framework of Marxian critical theory involves a pedagogical practice that is simultaneously literary, philosophical, and political. It requires introducing students to the texts of the Bengali literary tradition with the depth of attention and the sensitivity to language and form that serious literary education demands. It requires providing students with the theoretical frameworks necessary to understand those texts in relation to the historical, social, and political conditions of their production and reception. It requires developing in students the critical capacity to distinguish between ideology and truth, between the apparent meaning of a text and its deeper social significance, between the consolations of aesthetic pleasure and the demands of political understanding. And it requires doing all of this in a way that is intellectually honest, personally respectful of the students' own developing minds, and politically responsible in the sense of taking seriously the implications of what one teaches for the way one's students will subsequently understand and act in the world.

This is an extraordinary demand, and it is one that not all teachers in the tradition fully meet. But it defines the ideal toward which the best teaching in the tradition aims, and it is the ideal that Abdul Kafi's own pedagogical practice, as far as we can assess it from outside, seems to embody.

5.2 The Student as Interlocutor and the Problem of Authority

One of the most fundamental pedagogical questions in the Marxian tradition is the question of the relationship between teacher and student, between intellectual authority and democratic participation, between the wisdom of experience and the energy of youth. This question is especially charged in the context of Jadavpur University, which has historically been a site of intense student political activism and which has at times seen conflicts between student movements and faculty authority that have been philosophically as well as practically significant.

The assault on Abdul Kafi by a former student illustrates, in an extreme and pathological form, the tensions that can develop in the teacher-student relationship when those tensions are not managed well. But the more everyday tensions, the conflicts over evaluation, over curricular content, over the power differential inherent in the examination system, are also philosophically significant. They raise fundamental questions about the nature of intellectual authority, about the relationship between knowledge and power in the educational context, and about how a tradition that is committed to democratic values can maintain the forms of intellectual authority that effective teaching requires without reproducing the authoritarian patterns of the broader social order.

Freire's analysis of what he called the "banking concept of education," the model in which the teacher deposits knowledge into the passive mind of the student as if into a bank account, remains the most influential Marxian-influenced critique of educational authority. Freire's alternative, the dialogical method, understands education as a process of mutual inquiry in which teacher and student together investigate the world, each bringing their own knowledge and experience to the process, and each being transformed by the encounter. This is an inspiring vision, but it raises practical questions about how it can be implemented in the specific context of university education, where the teacher does have knowledge and skills that the student lacks, and where the institution requires forms of evaluation that necessarily involve asymmetric judgment.

The tension between intellectual authority and democratic participation is not simply a practical problem to be managed. It is a reflection of deeper contradictions in the social order that the university reproduces even as it critiques. A Marxian pedagogy that is honest about these contradictions will not pretend that the teacher-student relationship can be fully symmetrical within the existing social order. But it will also insist on the importance of forms of teaching that minimize rather than maximize the authoritarian dimensions of that relationship, that invite students into genuine intellectual engagement rather than demanding passive reception, and that model in the classroom the kind of critical, dialogical thinking that the tradition advocates in theory.

5.3 Transmitting a Tradition: The Challenge of the Next Generation

The question of how the Bengali Marxian tradition is transmitted to the next generation of scholars is not merely a pedagogical question. It is a question about the cultural reproduction of an intellectual community, and it raises issues about institutional continuity, about the conditions under which serious intellectual work can be sustained, and about the relationship between the specific content of a tradition and the institutional forms through which it is transmitted.

Any intellectual tradition faces the fundamental problem of transmission: how to pass on to the next generation not merely the surface content of the tradition's accumulated knowledge but the deeper intellectual orientations, the critical habits of mind, the political commitments, and the scholarly standards that give that knowledge its significance. This is always a difficult problem, because the deepest aspects of any intellectual tradition are precisely those that are most difficult to transmit explicitly. The textbook can convey the arguments. The syllabus can assign the readings. The examination can assess the student's ability to reproduce the content. But the quality of intellectual seriousness, the habit of critical thinking, the sense of political responsibility, the willingness to follow an argument wherever it leads even when the destination is uncomfortable: these are not things that can be transmitted through explicit instruction alone. They require immersion in a living community of scholars, sustained contact with models of serious intellectual practice, and the slow development of intellectual character through years of engagement with demanding texts and demanding interlocutors.

The challenges to this kind of transmission in the current period are significant. The increasing pressure of metric-based academic governance tends to reward the production of publishable outputs over the cultivation of intellectual depth. The growing precarity of academic

employment means that fewer scholars have the security and the time necessary for the slow development of serious scholarly work. The fragmentation of academic culture by the proliferation of social media and the acceleration of the information environment makes it harder to sustain the kind of sustained, concentrated attention that deep intellectual work requires.

And yet the tradition continues to reproduce itself, in modified forms and with significant losses, through the specific institutional structures and cultural practices that Jadavpur University and its Bengali department have developed over decades. The doctoral supervision relationship, in which a senior scholar guides a junior scholar through the process of producing original research, remains a powerful mechanism for the transmission of intellectual culture. The seminars and colloquia of the Centre for Marxian Studies bring together scholars from different disciplines and generations in the kind of open, critical intellectual exchange that models the tradition's values and keeps them alive. The publication of essays in Bengali by scholars like Abdul Kafi creates texts that the next generation of students can engage with as models of serious Marxian literary criticism.

The tradition is also being transmitted through forms of outreach and engagement that extend beyond the formal academic context. The cultural events organized by the department, including the Sishu-kishore Utsav that Abdul Kafi has helped to organize, connect the academic work of the department to the broader Bengali cultural community. The involvement of faculty and students in political and social movements connects the tradition's intellectual commitments to the ongoing work of social transformation. These forms of extra-academic engagement are not peripheral to the tradition's survival: they are part of what keeps the tradition socially rooted and politically alive, preventing it from becoming merely an academic subspecialty divorced from the social reality it claims to analyze.

5.4 Critical Pedagogy in the Bengali Context: An Application

Let us now apply the general principles of critical pedagogy that we have been discussing to the specific context of teaching Bengali Marxian literary criticism at Jadavpur University, using the texts that Abdul Kafi has made central to his own scholarly work as a case study.

Imagine a graduate seminar on Tagore's *Raktakarobi* (Red Oleander), taught within the framework of Marxian literary criticism. The seminar begins not with a lecture on the play's meaning but with a reading of the play itself: students are asked to read it carefully and to bring to the seminar their own initial responses, their own questions and confusions, their own sense of what the play is doing and why it matters. The teacher's first move is not to correct these initial responses but to take them seriously as the starting point of inquiry: to ask what experiences, what assumptions, what frameworks of understanding have produced these particular responses, and what that tells us about the relationship between the play and its readers.

From this dialogical starting point, the seminar can move outward in several directions simultaneously. Students can be invited to compare their contemporary reading of the play with its original historical reception: what did Tagore's contemporaries make of it, and what assumptions shaped their understanding? What does the difference between the historical reception and our contemporary reading tell us about how reading itself is historically

conditioned? Students can be introduced to the specific historical context of the play's composition: the year 1924, the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement, Tagore's complex and critical relationship with Indian nationalism, the specific theatrical conventions that the play challenges. And students can be introduced to the Marxian theoretical framework that allows us to read the play as a critique of the logic of capitalist extraction and the commodification of human beings.

But critically, this introduction of the theoretical framework is not presented as the correct reading that replaces the students' initial readings. It is presented as a tool for inquiry: a way of asking new questions of the text that illuminate dimensions of its meaning not visible to the naked eye. The test of the framework is not whether it confirms our prior political commitments but whether it helps us to see more, to understand more, to connect the specific features of the text to the broader patterns of social reality that shape it. And the measure of success in the seminar is not the student's ability to reproduce the framework but their ability to use it: to bring it into productive dialogue with their own experience, with other frameworks, with other texts, and with the pressing questions of the present.

This is what critical pedagogy in the Bengali Marxian tradition looks like at its best: an engagement with texts and theories that is simultaneously intellectually rigorous and personally meaningful, that connects the specific pleasures and insights of literary study to the broader project of understanding and transforming the world.

CHAPTER SIX: THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES AND THE FUTURE OF BENGALI LITERARY SCHOLARSHIP

Technological Change, Scholarly Method, and the Politics of the Archive

6.1 What the Digital Humanities Offers and What It Threatens

The digital humanities movement has transformed the landscape of literary scholarship over the past two decades in ways that are both genuinely enabling and genuinely threatening for the kind of work practiced in the Bengali Marxian tradition. Understanding this transformation requires separating the genuine intellectual contributions of digital methods from the ideological assumptions that sometimes accompany them, and asking honestly what is gained and what is lost by the application of digital tools to the study of literature.

The genuine contributions are significant. The digitalization of textual archives has made accessible to scholars without access to well-funded research libraries an enormous range of historical materials that were previously available only to those able to travel to major archives. For Bengali literary scholarship specifically, the digitalization of historical journals, newspapers, and out-of-print books has opened up new possibilities for research into the history of Bengali print culture, the reception of specific literary works, and the development of literary debates over time. The Internet Archive, the digital collections of national and state libraries, and the

specific digitalization projects undertaken by institutions like the Bangla Academy have all contributed to this expansion of scholarly access.

The tools of computational text analysis, including corpus analysis, stylometric methods, topic modeling, and network analysis, offer new possibilities for the large-scale study of literary history that complement and extend the possibilities of close reading. The question of how specific vocabulary, imagery, and thematic concerns are distributed across large bodies of texts, how literary influence operates at the level of linguistic and stylistic patterns rather than simply at the level of thematic content, how the print market shapes the distribution of literary forms: all of these questions can be approached with new rigor and new empirical grounding using computational methods. Franco Moretti's work on "distant reading," whatever its limitations, has demonstrated that there are genuine intellectual insights to be gained from the application of quantitative methods to literary history.

But the threats are equally significant. The computational analysis of large text corpora requires that those texts be available in digital form, which means that the corpus analyzed is determined by what has been digitalized, which in turn is determined by institutional priorities, funding patterns, and the biases built into the selection criteria of digitalization projects. The historical overrepresentation of print-dominant, urban, upper-caste, male-authored texts in the historical archive is reproduced in the digital archive unless specific corrective efforts are made to include the oral traditions, the popular literature, the women's writing, and the lower-caste cultural production that the traditional canon has marginalized. A distant reading of Bengali literary history based on what has been digitalized will reproduce the biases of the traditional archive rather than transcending them.

The deeper philosophical issue is the relationship between quantitative method and humanistic interpretation. The value of close reading as a method in literary studies lies not in its ability to process large volumes of text but in its quality of attention: its capacity to be genuinely surprised by a specific text, to notice details that do not fit the expected patterns, to follow the logic of a particular literary work wherever it leads. These are qualities of mind that cannot be delegated to an algorithm, however sophisticated. The danger of the digital humanities, at its worst, is the substitution of the spurious precision of quantitative method for the genuine understanding that humanistic interpretation at its best achieves.

For the Bengali Marxian tradition, the appropriate relationship to digital methods is one of critical engagement rather than either wholesale adoption or wholesale rejection. The tradition can and should use the tools that digital scholarship offers where those tools genuinely illuminate questions that matter. It should also be clear-eyed about the limitations of those tools and about the specific ways in which the digital transformation of scholarship reproduces the power relations of the broader social order.

6.2 The Politics of the Digital Archive

The question of who controls the digital archive of Bengali literature and culture is not a technical question but a political one. Archives are never neutral: they represent decisions about what is worth preserving, what is worth making accessible, and in what form it should be made

available. These decisions are always shaped by power relations, by institutional priorities, by linguistic hierarchies, and by the broader politics of knowledge production.

The dominant digital archives of world literature are controlled by institutions and corporations based in the global North, primarily in the United States and Europe. The decisions made by these institutions about what to digitalize, in what format, under what terms of access, and in what relationship to copyright law all reflect the priorities of these institutions rather than the needs of scholars and readers in the global South. For Bengali literary scholarship specifically, this means that the availability and accessibility of Bengali texts in digital form is substantially determined by decisions made in offices far from Kolkata, by people who may have little understanding of or interest in the specific concerns of Bengali intellectual life.

This situation creates both practical difficulties for Bengali scholars who want to use digital resources and theoretical problems for a Marxian analysis of the political economy of knowledge. The concept of the digital commons, which has been developed by scholars like Lawrence Lessig and Yochai Benkler, describes the potential for digital technology to create a genuinely open and accessible space for the sharing of knowledge and culture. This potential is real: the internet has genuinely democratized access to information in ways that were not possible in the age of print. But the enclosure of the digital commons by platform corporations and by restrictive intellectual property regimes has substantially limited the realization of this potential.

For the Bengali Marxian tradition, the response to this situation involves both practical and theoretical dimensions. At the practical level, it involves supporting and developing open-access digital archives of Bengali literature and culture that are controlled by Bengali and Indian institutions and that prioritize the needs of Bengali scholars and readers. At the theoretical level, it involves developing a critical analysis of the political economy of the digital knowledge economy that exposes the ways in which the apparent universality of digital access conceals the specific power relations through which it is structured.

6.3 Social Media, Academic Discourse, and the Transformation of the Public Sphere

The emergence of social media platforms as major venues for public intellectual discourse has transformed the landscape of academic communication in ways that create both new opportunities and new risks for scholars working in the Bengali Marxian tradition. The opportunities are real: social media makes it possible for academic scholars to communicate directly with wide audiences outside the academic context, to participate in public debates about important social and political questions in real time, and to build communities of readers and interlocutors across geographical and institutional boundaries. The risks are equally real: social media platforms are designed to maximize engagement rather than to promote understanding, they reward provocative and polarizing statements over nuanced and careful arguments, they expose academic scholars to forms of harassment and abuse that were not possible in the pre-digital era, and they create incentives for the simplification of complex ideas in ways that can distort the intellectual commitments that the simplification is supposed to communicate.

For scholars like Abdul Kafi who work in a tradition of careful, politically committed intellectual work, the relationship to social media is necessarily ambivalent. On one hand, the platform offers possibilities for reaching audiences that the academic essay or the Bengali-language monograph cannot easily reach. On the other hand, the logic of the platform tends to distort precisely the qualities that make the intellectual work valuable: its complexity, its care, its commitment to understanding over performance.

The philosophical question raised by this situation is a version of an old question about the relationship between the demands of truth and the demands of rhetoric: between what is true and what is persuasive, between what is important and what is attention-getting. The classical Marxian tradition, from Marx himself to Gramsci to Raymond Williams, has always insisted that intellectual work must be accessible without being simplistic, that the communication of complex ideas to wide audiences requires genuine pedagogical skill rather than mere simplification, and that the intellectual who abandons rigor in the name of accessibility has not actually made their ideas more accessible but has instead replaced the real ideas with something easier and less threatening. This insistence remains valid in the age of social media, and it provides an important corrective to the tendency of the platform environment to reward simplicity and spectacle over depth and nuance.

CHAPTER SEVEN: JURISPRUDENCE, LAW, AND THE POLITICS OF ACADEMIC RIGHTS

The Legal Framework of Intellectual Freedom in Contemporary India

7.1 Constitutional Foundations and Their Limits

The relationship between law and intellectual freedom is one of the most important and least examined dimensions of the Bengali Marxian tradition's engagement with the institutions of the contemporary Indian state. To understand how academic freedom is actually protected or threatened in practice requires not simply an analysis of the constitutional guarantees that exist in principle but an examination of how those guarantees are interpreted, applied, and enforced in the specific context of the contemporary Indian political-legal landscape.

The Indian Constitution, in its fundamental rights provisions, provides a framework for the protection of intellectual freedom that is, in principle, among the most robust in the world. Article 19(1)(a) guarantees the right to freedom of speech and expression, which the Supreme Court has consistently interpreted to include the right to academic freedom and freedom of inquiry. Article 19(1)(g) protects the right to carry on any occupation, trade, or profession, which includes the profession of academic scholarship. Article 21 protects the right to life and personal liberty, which the Supreme Court has interpreted broadly to include the right to dignity and the right to privacy. And Article 25 protects the right to freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practice, and propagate religion, which has implications for the protection of the religious identity of scholars like Abdul Kafi from official discrimination.

But constitutional rights are only as effective as the legal mechanisms through which they are enforced. The practical protection of academic freedom in India depends on the willingness of courts to enforce constitutional guarantees against both the state and private actors, on the capacity of academic institutions to defend the rights of their members against external interference, and on the strength of the professional and civil society organizations that advocate for academic freedom when it is threatened. All of these dimensions have been under pressure in the current political conjuncture, and the practical reality of academic freedom in India has been substantially diminished even where the constitutional framework has remained formally intact.

The use of sedition laws, the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), and other legal instruments to criminalize and intimidate scholars, journalists, and activists who speak critically about the government represents a fundamental threat to academic freedom that cannot be addressed simply by appealing to constitutional guarantees. When the law itself is used as a tool of political repression, the legal framework that is supposed to protect freedom becomes instead an instrument of its suppression. The appropriate response to this situation is not despair but political engagement: the defense of academic freedom requires both legal advocacy within the existing framework and political action to change the framework where it has been perverted.

For the Bengali Marxian tradition, the engagement with legal questions is not peripheral. The analysis of the relationship between law, state power, and the interests of capital has been central to Marxian political philosophy since Marx's own critique of the juridical form in the Critique of the Gotha Programme and Capital. The concept of law as the expression of the will of the dominant class, the analysis of the legal form as a mystification that presents the relations of capitalist exploitation in the neutral language of rights and contracts, the critique of formal legal equality as a mask for substantive social inequality: these are central themes in the Marxian tradition that have direct relevance to the analysis of the current legal threats to academic freedom.

At the same time, the Marxian tradition needs to be careful not to let its critique of law's ideological function lead it to abandon the defense of legal rights that, however limited and contradictory, remain important practical protections for individuals and groups in an unequal society. The right to academic freedom may be a bourgeois right in the sense that its historical genesis lies in the development of bourgeois society, but its practical protection is a genuine good for scholars like Abdul Kafi who face real threats from political actors who would be happy to see the tradition of critical scholarship he represents silenced. A sophisticated Marxian jurisprudence will both critique the limitations of the legal form and defend the specific legal rights that provide practical protection for the work of political and intellectual resistance.

7.2 The Rights of Minority Scholars and the Problem of Equal Protection

The specific situation of Muslim scholars like Abdul Kafi within the Indian legal framework raises questions about the adequacy of the equal protection framework for protecting the rights of religious minorities in a context of majoritarian political dominance. The formal legal framework of equal protection, embodied in Articles 14, 15, and 16 of the Constitution, prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. But the practical reality

of discrimination against Muslim scholars and intellectuals in the current political context cannot be addressed simply by pointing to these formal prohibitions.

The problem is not simply that individual instances of discrimination are not being prosecuted and punished, though that is part of the problem. It is that the broader political culture that the Hindu nationalist movement has promoted creates an environment of diffuse discrimination and intimidation that is not easily captured by the individual rights framework. When the dominant political discourse treats Muslim identity as inherently suspect, when the appointment of administrators and officials who share this view creates institutional environments that are hostile to Muslim scholars, and when the normalization of anti-Muslim rhetoric in public discourse creates a climate of intimidation that affects the daily work and wellbeing of Muslim academics: these are forms of discrimination and harm that the individual rights framework, even when effectively enforced, cannot fully address.

What is needed, in addition to the enforcement of formal equal protection rights, is what legal scholars in the critical race theory tradition have called structural anti-discrimination: an approach to the protection of minority rights that addresses the systemic and structural dimensions of discrimination rather than focusing only on individual incidents of prejudicial treatment. This requires institutional reforms that create genuinely inclusive academic environments, curricular reforms that incorporate the perspectives and contributions of minority scholars and communities, and cultural changes in the academic world that challenge the implicit assumptions of majority privilege that pervade the scholarly mainstream.

For the Bengali Marxian tradition, this is both a political demand and an intellectual project. The intellectual project of developing an adequate framework for understanding and challenging the structural dimensions of minority discrimination in the academic world is itself a contribution to the broader Marxian project of analyzing how power operates through ideology, culture, and institutional practice as well as through direct economic exploitation.

7.3 The Right to Strike and the Politics of Academic Labor

The political economy of academic labor in contemporary India raises important questions about the rights of academic workers to organize, to strike, and to resist the conditions of their employment through collective action. These are questions that connect the philosophical tradition of thinking about labor rights to the specific institutional context of the Indian university and to the specific situation of scholars like Abdul Kafi who work within that institution.

The right to strike is recognized in principle by Indian labor law, but its application to academic workers is complicated by the specific character of academic labor and by the specific institutional arrangements of the public university. Faculty members in public universities are typically classified as government employees, which creates certain restrictions on their right to strike and certain protections for their conditions of employment. The teachers' associations that exist in most Indian universities, including the Jadavpur University Teachers' Association, play an important role in defending the rights and interests of faculty members within these constraints.

The Jadavpur University Teachers' Association demonstrated its importance in the immediate aftermath of the assault on Abdul Kafi, when it demanded strict action against the assailant and provided collective support and advocacy for the victim. This kind of collective solidarity is not merely a practical mechanism for defending individual rights: it is an expression of the values of collective protection and mutual responsibility that the Marxian tradition has always placed at the center of its vision of human community.

The broader question of academic labor rights connects to the global debate about the casualization of academic work and its effects on the quality of academic life and academic production. As universities increasingly rely on short-term, part-time, and contract academic staff rather than permanent faculty to teach their courses, the conditions under which teaching and research are conducted have deteriorated significantly. Casualized academic workers are less able to invest in the long-term, deep intellectual engagement that serious scholarship requires. They are less able to build the kind of relationships with students and colleagues that sustain intellectual communities over time. And they are less able to speak and write freely on politically sensitive topics without the protection of tenure or permanent employment.

For the Bengali Marxian tradition, this is a concrete material threat to the conditions of intellectual production. The tradition's capacity to develop and transmit its intellectual commitments depends on the existence of a stable community of scholars who have the security and the time to do serious long-term intellectual work. The casualization of academic labor undermines this community and threatens the conditions of the tradition's own reproduction.

CHAPTER EIGHT: POLITICAL ECONOMY AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Imperialism, Development, and the Bengali Marxian Contribution to Economic Theory

8.1 The Political Economy Tradition at the Centre for Marxian Studies

The Centre for Marxian Studies at Jadavpur University has, as we have noted in previous parts of this textbook, brought together scholars of political economy and literary culture in a genuinely interdisciplinary engagement with the Marxian tradition. This is not merely a matter of scheduling economists and literary critics in the same seminar series. It reflects a genuine intellectual conviction that the analysis of culture and the analysis of political economy are inseparable dimensions of a single project: the comprehensive understanding of capitalism as a social formation that shapes every dimension of human life, from the organization of production to the structure of consciousness.

The political economists who have participated in the Centre's work, including Prabhat Patnaik, Utsa Patnaik, Amiya Kumar Bagchi, and Samir Amin, have all developed analyses of global capitalism that are directly relevant to the situation of Bengal and India within the world system. Utsa Patnaik's work on the drain of wealth from colonial India, which she has calculated as a figure running into trillions of dollars over the colonial period, provides a powerful empirical foundation for the Marxian analysis of imperialism and its consequences for the political

economy of the Indian subcontinent. Prabhat Patnaik's work on the relationship between finance capital and the state in the era of globalization, his analysis of the deflationary bias of neoliberal economic policy, and his arguments about the necessity of democratic state intervention to address poverty and inequality in developing countries, all connect the abstract categories of Marxian political economy to the specific realities of the contemporary Indian and global situations.

For Abdul Kafi's work as a literary scholar, these political-economic analyses provide an essential background for understanding the social conditions within which the literary texts he analyzes were produced and within which they continue to be read. Literature does not exist in a vacuum. It is produced and consumed within specific economic conditions that shape what can be written, what is published, who reads it, and what it means to its readers. The analysis of the political economy of Bengali literary culture, including the economics of the publishing industry, the relationship between writers and their readership, the impact of colonial economic conditions on the possibilities of literary production, and the effects of neoliberal economic development on contemporary cultural life: all of these are dimensions of the literary analysis that a specifically Marxian approach makes visible.

8.2 Dependency, Development, and the Bengali Experience

The theory of dependency, as developed by Latin American scholars including Raul Prebisch, Andre Gunder Frank, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, argues that the underdevelopment of peripheral societies is not a stage in a universal process of capitalist development but a structural feature of the global capitalist system that results from the specific form of integration of peripheral economies into the world market. This argument, which challenges the liberal assumption that capitalism naturally promotes development wherever it operates, has been enormously influential in the Marxian analysis of development and underdevelopment in the global South.

For Bengal and India, the dependency framework has been applied most powerfully by scholars like Bagchi, whose analysis of de-industrialization in colonial Bengal showed that British colonial rule did not simply fail to develop India but actively underdeveloped it by destroying existing Indian industries to create markets for British manufactured goods. This analysis, grounded in careful historical research, provides an empirical foundation for the theoretical claims of dependency theory and connects those claims to the specific history of Bengal as a colonial economy.

The implications of this analysis for the literary tradition are significant. The specific character of Bengali literary culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including its particular relationship to modernity, its specific forms of engagement with colonial capitalism, and its distinctive treatment of questions of class, poverty, and social change, cannot be fully understood without reference to the specific political-economic conditions of colonial and postcolonial Bengal. The literary texts that Abdul Kafi analyzes in his scholarship are not simply aesthetic objects: they are products of a specific social formation shaped by a specific history of colonial exploitation and resistance, and understanding them requires understanding that history.

The de-industrialization of Bengal under colonial rule had specific cultural consequences that the literary tradition records and responds to. The destruction of the artisan economy, the transformation of the agrarian economy by colonial land tenure arrangements, the emergence of a new Bengali middle class that was dependent on colonial institutions for its economic position while simultaneously resisting colonial cultural dominance: all of these processes created the specific social conditions within which the Bengali literary tradition of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was produced. A Marxian literary criticism that attends to these political-economic conditions can illuminate dimensions of the literary tradition that a purely aesthetic or biographical approach cannot reach.

8.3 Imperialism in the Twenty-First Century and its Cultural Dimensions

The analysis of imperialism in the twenty-first century requires going beyond the classical frameworks developed by Lenin and Bukharin to understand the specific forms that imperialist relations take in the era of financial globalization, digital capitalism, and the apparent retreat of formal colonial domination. The continuation of imperialist relations through the mechanisms of financial capital, intellectual property rights, trade agreements, and the conditionalities of international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank represents a new phase of the imperialism that Lenin analyzed, one that operates largely through market mechanisms rather than through direct political and military domination but that is no less effective in maintaining the subordination of peripheral economies to the interests of core capital.

For the Bengali Marxian tradition, the analysis of twenty-first century imperialism requires connecting the abstract categories of political-economic analysis to the specific cultural realities of contemporary Bengali life. The ways in which global cultural industries shape the tastes and aspirations of Bengali consumers, the ways in which the English-language academic mainstream marginalizes Bengali-language scholarship, the ways in which the intellectual property regime of global capitalism commodifies and privatizes cultural production: all of these are specific cultural expressions of imperialist relations that a Marxian cultural analysis can illuminate.

Samir Amin's concept of cultural imperialism, which he developed in his analysis of Eurocentrism and the world-system, provides a useful framework for thinking about these questions. Amin argued that the cultural dominance of Western capitalist modernity is not simply a matter of the superiority of Western cultural products in a fair market: it is a product of the structural subordination of peripheral cultures to the cultural industries of the core, combined with the active promotion of Eurocentric values and assumptions as universal standards of cultural achievement. The challenge to cultural imperialism requires not simply the production of alternative cultural content but the development of alternative frameworks for understanding and evaluating cultural production: frameworks that recognize the specific achievements of non-Western cultural traditions on their own terms rather than measuring them against the implicit standards of Western modernity.

This is exactly the project that the Bengali Marxian literary tradition has been pursuing, in specific and concrete ways, throughout its history. The insistence on reading Bengali literary texts within the Bengali cultural tradition rather than measuring them against Western aesthetic standards, the analysis of Bengali literature in relation to the specific social conditions of its

production rather than in terms of universal aesthetic categories derived from Western critical theory, the defense of Bengali as a language of serious intellectual work rather than accepting the implicit hierarchy that places English at the top of the global language order: all of these are specific cultural-intellectual practices that resist cultural imperialism in the way that Amin describes.

CHAPTER NINE: PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS AND THE MARXIAN PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

Dialectics, Materialism, and the Philosophy of Praxis in the Bengali Context

9.1 Philosophy and Literature: The Question of Mediation

One of the most fundamental philosophical questions in Marxian literary theory is the question of how to understand the relationship between philosophical categories and literary texts. This is a question of mediation: how do the abstract categories of Marxian political economy and historical materialism connect to the specific, concrete, sensuous particularity of literary works? What is the relationship between the concept of commodity fetishism and the specific images of a novel? Between the theory of base and superstructure and the specific formal choices of a playwright? Between the concept of class consciousness and the specific narrative voice of a short story?

The history of Marxian literary theory is largely the history of different answers to this question of mediation. Georgy Lukacs, in his early theoretical work, developed the concept of totality as the key mediating category: the great realist work is one that captures the totality of social relations within the specific particulars of its narrative, achieving through the organization of its fictional world a form of understanding of the social whole that is not available to direct observation or abstract theoretical analysis. Bertolt Brecht challenged this vision of totality with his concept of the alienation effect: the great work is not one that creates the illusion of a seamless social totality but one that interrupts that illusion, creating distance between the spectator and the action represented in ways that make visible the contradictions and contingencies that the illusion of totality conceals.

The Frankfurt School tradition, represented most fully by Theodor Adorno, rejected both positions in favor of a theory of aesthetic autonomy: the work of art achieves its critical function not by representing social reality or by mobilizing political awareness but by maintaining its difference from the logic of commodity exchange through the specificity of its formal organization. The truly critical work is one that resists integration into the logic of the culture industry, not by promoting political awareness in its content but by being genuinely and irreducibly itself in its form.

For the Bengali Marxian tradition, these different positions in European Marxian aesthetics are not simply theoretical options to be chosen between. They are frameworks that need to be evaluated in relation to the specific character of the Bengali literary tradition and the specific

social conditions within which that tradition has operated. The question is not which European theory is correct in the abstract but which aspects of these theories illuminate specific features of the Bengali situation and which aspects need to be modified or replaced by frameworks more adequate to the specific history and character of Bengali literary culture.

9.2 Dialectical Materialism and the Study of Language

The philosophical tradition of Marxian dialectics has implications for the study of language that are directly relevant to the work of a literary scholar like Abdul Kafi who works in the Department of Bengali. The Marxian analysis of language, most fully developed in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and his circle, understands language not as a neutral medium for the transmission of pre-existing meanings but as a site of social struggle in which different class positions, different ideological frameworks, and different forms of social experience compete for expression and dominance.

Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, the irreducible multiplicity of social voices and ideological perspectives that exists within any living language, is directly relevant to the study of Bengali as a literary language. Bengali literary language is not a unified, homogeneous medium: it is a contested space in which different registers, different dialects, different class-inflected vocabularies, and different ideological frameworks compete and interact. The literary text, in Bakhtin's analysis, is a staging of this heteroglossia: a representation of the dialogue and conflict of social voices within the medium of artistic form.

For a Marxian literary criticism that takes language seriously, the analysis of a text like Raktakarobi or a poem from Langol requires attention not only to what the text says at the level of its manifest content but to how it says it: to the specific features of its language that register the social positions and ideological perspectives of its characters and its narrator, to the ways in which the text's language enacts or contests the social hierarchies that structure the world it represents, and to the specific forms of linguistic creativity through which the author achieves effects that are not available to everyday language.

The study of Bengali as a linguistic system, including its grammatical structure, its system of honorifics and address, its dialectal variations across geographical and social groups, and its historical development through the colonial encounter with English and through the process of standardization: all of these dimensions of linguistic analysis are directly relevant to the literary criticism of Bengali texts and to the broader Marxian project of understanding how language mediates the relationship between social structure and consciousness.

9.3 The Philosophy of Praxis and the Question of Agency

The concept of praxis, which Marx developed from Hegel through the concept of sensuous, practical human activity as the foundation of all social life, is one of the central philosophical commitments of the Marxian tradition. Praxis refers to the specifically human capacity to transform the world through purposeful, self-aware activity: the capacity that distinguishes human labor from the instinctual activities of animals and that makes possible both the human

creation of social institutions and the human transformation of those institutions through political action.

For a literary scholar working in the Marxian tradition, the philosophy of praxis raises important questions about the relationship between intellectual work and social transformation. Is intellectual work itself a form of praxis in the relevant sense? Does the scholarship of a literary critic like Abdul Kafi contribute to the transformation of social relations, and if so, how? What is the specific form of agency available to the intellectual within the social division of labor, and what are its limitations?

Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual provides one framework for answering these questions. The organic intellectual, as Gramsci understood the role, is someone who combines intellectual work with political leadership within a specific social class or social movement, who helps that class or movement to develop its own understanding of its situation and its own capacity for self-organization. This is not simply the academic writing books and articles: it is the intellectual who is genuinely embedded in the social movement they seek to understand and serve, who brings their intellectual skills to the practical tasks of political education, cultural organization, and strategic analysis.

For Abdul Kafi, the question of how this understanding of intellectual agency applies to his specific situation is a genuinely difficult one. His institutional position as a professor at a public university places him within a specific structure of power that both enables and constrains his intellectual work. His coordination of the Centre for Marxian Studies provides a platform for the kind of broad intellectual engagement that the organic intellectual model requires. His teaching practice puts him in sustained contact with the next generation of students who will carry the tradition forward. But the specific political context of contemporary India, with its specific threats to academic freedom and its specific forms of political repression, creates constraints on the public intellectual role that Gramsci's concept implies.

The resolution of this tension, if there is one, lies not in the abandonment of the intellectual role for direct political activism, nor in the withdrawal of intellectual work into the safety of pure scholarship, but in the maintenance of the kind of politically committed intellectual work that the tradition at its best represents: work that is rigorous enough to meet the standards of serious scholarship and politically engaged enough to make a genuine contribution to the understanding and the transformation of the world.

CHAPTER TEN: RENEWAL AND PROSPECT

The Future of the Bengali Marxian Tradition in a Changing World

10.1 What Renewal Means for an Intellectual Tradition

To speak of the renewal of an intellectual tradition is not the same as speaking of its survival. Survival can mean mere persistence, the continuation of familiar forms and formulas beyond the

conditions that originally gave them life. Renewal means something more demanding and more interesting: it means the transformation of a tradition in response to new conditions and new challenges, in ways that preserve the essential commitments and insights of the tradition while developing new forms and frameworks adequate to the present.

The history of the Marxian tradition is itself a history of renewal. From the First International to the Second, from the Leninist model of the vanguard party to Gramsci's conception of hegemony, from Western Marxism to Third World Marxism, from the Marxism of the Cold War to the post-Soviet attempts to think Marxism after the collapse of actually existing socialism: each of these transitions represents a renewal of the tradition in response to new conditions. Not all of these renewals have been successful. Some have involved significant losses: the jettisoning of important theoretical insights in the haste to adapt to new conditions. Others have involved significant gains: the development of new frameworks and new concepts that have genuinely enriched the tradition's capacity to understand the world.

For the Bengali Marxian tradition specifically, the renewal required by the current moment involves several distinct but related dimensions. It involves the theoretical expansion of the framework to incorporate the insights of feminist theory, anti-caste thought, ecological Marxism, and digital political economy that we have discussed in previous chapters. It involves the institutional renewal of the structures through which the tradition is reproduced, including the university, the Centre for Marxian Studies, and the broader network of left cultural organizations in Bengal. It involves the pedagogical renewal of the practices through which the tradition is transmitted to new generations of students, in ways that maintain intellectual rigor while engaging with the specific concerns and experiences of contemporary students. And it involves the political renewal of the tradition's engagement with the social movements and political forces that are currently challenging the dominant order, including the feminist movement, the anti-caste movement, the ecology movement, and the democratic resistance to authoritarian nationalism.

These different dimensions of renewal are not independent: they are deeply interconnected, and progress in one dimension tends to support progress in the others. The theoretical expansion of the framework to incorporate anti-caste thought, for example, is not merely an academic exercise: it has direct implications for the institutional culture of the university and for the pedagogical practices of teachers within it. The development of more inclusive institutional practices, in turn, creates the conditions for the participation of a wider range of social perspectives in the theoretical work of the tradition, enriching it in ways that purely internal theoretical development cannot achieve.

10.2 The Contribution of Abdul Kafi to the Tradition's Renewal

Abdul Kafi's specific contribution to the renewal of the Bengali Marxian tradition cannot be fully assessed from outside the tradition and from the distance of incomplete information about his work. But on the basis of what we know about his institutional role, his scholarly commitments, and his pedagogical practice, we can identify several dimensions of his contribution that are significant for the tradition's renewal.

His role as Coordinator of the Centre for Marxian Studies has been crucial for maintaining the institutional infrastructure through which the tradition's interdisciplinary character is sustained. The Centre's consistent engagement with scholars from across the disciplines of economics, history, literature, philosophy, and political science, including some of the most important Marxian thinkers in the world, has kept the Bengali tradition in active dialogue with the broader international conversation in Marxian scholarship. This is not a trivial achievement in the current political context, where the forces of Hindu nationalism and neoliberal academic governance both work, in different ways, to isolate and marginalize the kind of engaged Marxian scholarship that the Centre represents.

His scholarly work, centered on the analysis of three specific Bengali literary texts from the perspective of Marxian literary criticism, demonstrates a commitment to the specific practice of close reading that is one of the tradition's most important intellectual resources. The choice of texts, including Tagore's *Raktakarobi* and the journal *Langol*, reflects a deep engagement with the specifically Bengali dimensions of the Marxian cultural tradition, connecting the abstract categories of Marxian analysis to the specific literary and cultural achievements of the Bengali left. This kind of grounded, text-specific Marxian criticism is a necessary complement to the more abstract theoretical work of political economy and philosophy, and its practice by a scholar who is also the Coordinator of the Centre for Marxian Studies reflects an admirable integration of theory and interpretation.

His organization of cultural events like the *Sishu-kishore Utsav* reflects a commitment to the extra-academic dimensions of intellectual life that is characteristic of the organic intellectual tradition within the Bengali Marxian heritage. The festival for children and young people is not a peripheral activity but an expression of the tradition's understanding that cultural work must engage the entire community, not just the university, if it is to be genuinely transformative. This kind of work connects the tradition to the living culture of the Bengali community in ways that purely academic work cannot achieve, and it represents a form of intellectual leadership that goes beyond the conventional academic role.

10.3 The Political Philosophical Legacy: Emancipation and its Conditions

The deepest question facing the Bengali Marxian tradition in the current moment is not institutional or tactical but philosophical: what does human emancipation mean in the present world, and what kinds of intellectual and political work can contribute to its realization? This is the question that has motivated the tradition since its beginning, and it is the question that gives the tradition its most fundamental significance.

The concept of emancipation in the Marxian tradition has several distinct dimensions. There is the economic dimension: the liberation of human beings from the compulsory labor imposed by the necessity of surviving in a society based on commodity production and wage labor. There is the political dimension: the liberation of human beings from the forms of state power and political authority that sustain and enforce the existing relations of exploitation. There is the cultural dimension: the liberation of human consciousness from the ideological frameworks that naturalize and justify existing forms of domination, making them appear inevitable or rational rather than historically contingent and politically challengeable. And there is the philosophical

dimension: the liberation of human reason from the heteronomous authority of tradition, religion, and prejudice, achieving the autonomy of thought that is the condition of genuine intellectual freedom.

For Abdul Kafi and the Bengali Marxian tradition, these different dimensions of emancipation are not abstractly separated. They are understood as interconnected aspects of a single project of human liberation that must be pursued simultaneously on multiple fronts. The work of Marxian literary criticism is itself a contribution to this project: not because literature by itself changes social relations, but because the critical understanding of literature as a form of ideological production and as a resource for counter-hegemonic consciousness is part of the broader work of cultural transformation that emancipation requires.

The specific contribution of the Bengali literary tradition to this project lies in the richness and complexity of the cultural resources it makes available. From Tagore's vision of human wholeness to Nazrul's revolutionary humanism, from Manik Bandyopadhyay's unflinching naturalism to Mahasweta Devi's politics of witness, the Bengali literary tradition has produced works of extraordinary power that engage with the conditions and possibilities of human emancipation in ways that are both aesthetically significant and politically important. The work of Marxian criticism that Abdul Kafi represents is a contribution to the ongoing interpretation and development of these resources: making them available to new generations of readers, connecting them to contemporary theoretical frameworks, and demonstrating their relevance to the pressing questions of the present.

10.4 Prospects for the Tradition: A Realistic Assessment

Any realistic assessment of the prospects for the Bengali Marxian tradition must acknowledge both the genuine difficulties the tradition faces and the genuine resources it has available to address them. Honesty requires acknowledging both sides of this picture without collapsing either into despair or into false optimism.

The difficulties are real and significant. The political environment of contemporary India is deeply hostile to the kind of secular, pluralist, Marxian intellectual work that the tradition represents. The institutional environment of the contemporary university, shaped by neoliberal academic governance and government interference, is increasingly unfavorable to the kind of long-term, politically engaged, vernacular-language scholarship that the tradition practices. The cultural environment of contemporary Bengal, shaped by social media, consumerism, and the fragmentation of the public sphere, is less receptive than earlier generations were to the kind of sustained intellectual engagement that serious literary and political criticism requires. And the global environment, shaped by the rise of digital capitalism, the acceleration of climate change, and the apparent weakness of the international left, creates conditions that are generally unfavorable to the kinds of social transformation that the tradition advocates.

And yet the resources are also real and significant. The tradition has a long history of survival and renewal in the face of adverse conditions, and it has always been most creative in moments of adversity. The Bengali literary tradition it engages with is extraordinarily rich and continues to produce work of high quality and political significance. The institutional infrastructure of

Jadavpur University and the Centre for Marxian Studies, however pressured, remains a genuine resource for serious intellectual work. The network of international scholars who have participated in the Centre's seminars provides connections to the broader global conversation in Marxian scholarship that are a genuine intellectual resource. And the tradition of student and faculty activism that has characterized Jadavpur throughout its history remains a source of energy and renewal that the most adverse political conditions have not been able to extinguish.

The Bengali Marxian tradition has always lived in tension: between the demands of intellectual rigor and the demands of political commitment, between the specific particularity of Bengali cultural life and the universal aspirations of Marxian theory, between the institutional constraints of the university and the freedom of thought that genuine intellectual work requires. This tension is not a weakness but a source of productive energy. It is what has kept the tradition from calcifying into a settled orthodoxy, what has made it capable of genuine renewal in the face of new challenges, and what has given it the vitality that continues to attract new scholars and new students to its concerns.

The future of the tradition depends, ultimately, on the quality of the intellectual and political work that its current and future practitioners do: the rigor with which they engage the texts they analyze, the honesty with which they confront the challenges the new social movements present to their frameworks, the courage with which they defend academic freedom and scholarly integrity in the face of political pressure, and the care with which they transmit the tradition to the next generation of students and scholars. These are qualities that no external development can guarantee or destroy. They are the responsibility of the scholars themselves, including the scholar whose life and work this textbook has made its central concern.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

Abdul Kafi's Methodology in Global Intellectual Context

11.1 The Method of Immanent Critique

One of the most distinctive and important features of the Marxian approach to literary analysis that Abdul Kafi represents is what the Frankfurt School tradition calls "immanent critique": the method of reading a text against itself, using the text's own internal logic and its own implicit standards to expose the contradictions between what it claims to achieve and what it actually accomplishes. This method, derived ultimately from Hegel's dialectical logic and developed by Adorno and Horkheimer in their analyses of the culture industry, is one of the most powerful tools in the Marxian critical arsenal. It is powerful precisely because it does not impose an external standard of judgment on the text but draws that standard from within the text itself, allowing the text's own commitments and aspirations to become the measure of its limitations.

Applied to the Bengali literary tradition that Abdul Kafi engages with, immanent critique means reading texts like *Raktakarobi* not primarily in terms of what an external political standard requires of them but in terms of what they themselves aspire to and where they fall short of their

own aspirations. Tagore's play aspires to a vision of human wholeness and creative freedom that it represents through the figure of Nandini and the world of color and life that she embodies. The question that immanent critique asks is not whether this vision conforms to the requirements of Marxian political analysis but whether the play itself, in its dramatic form and its resolution of the conflicts it stages, actually achieves the vision it aspires to. Does the play's critique of the logic of accumulation and extraction that the King's system represents succeed in imagining a genuinely alternative mode of being, or does it remain trapped within the framework it seeks to transcend? These are questions that the text itself invites, and immanent critique pursues them with the same rigor and the same fidelity to the text's own terms that the best close reading always brings to its object.

11.2 Comparative Philosophical Traditions: Tagore, Vivekananda, Ambedkar

The philosophical landscape of Bengal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was extraordinarily rich and diverse. The thinkers who emerged from this landscape, from Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda to Kazi Nazrul Islam and B.R. Ambedkar (who, while not Bengali, engaged intensively with the Bengali intellectual tradition through his encounters with its key texts and thinkers), represent a range of philosophical positions that have continued to shape Indian intellectual life for more than a century. Understanding Abdul Kafi's intellectual position requires situating it within this landscape and understanding how it relates to these different philosophical traditions.

Tagore's philosophical vision, as we have seen throughout this textbook, is central to Abdul Kafi's scholarly concerns. Tagore's thought defies simple categorization: it combines elements of the Upanishadic tradition, European romanticism, Bengali Vaishnavism, and humanist universalism in ways that are distinctive and often internally contradictory. His critique of nationalism and his vision of a humanity that transcends the divisions of nation, religion, and caste reflect a philosophical universalism that is both inspiring and, in the assessment of many Marxian critics, insufficiently attentive to the material conditions of social life that prevent the realization of the universalism it envisions.

Vivekananda's philosophical project was in some ways the opposite of Tagore's. Where Tagore sought to create a synthesis of tradition and modernity, of East and West, of the spiritual and the worldly, that would transcend existing divisions, Vivekananda sought to assert the specifically Hindu character of Indian civilization as a response to colonial cultural domination. His Neo-Vedantic philosophy, which reinterpreted the Advaita tradition of Shankara in ways that emphasized its compatibility with social reform and rational inquiry, was enormously influential in the development of the Hindu nationalist intellectual tradition. For the Bengali Marxian tradition, Vivekananda's legacy is complex: he was a genuine critic of the social complacency of the Bengali upper classes and a genuine advocate for the poor, but his cultural politics, with its assertion of Hindu civilization as the foundation of Indian identity, points in directions that are deeply at odds with the secular, pluralist commitments of the Marxian tradition.

Ambedkar's philosophical engagement with the Bengali tradition was complex and sometimes hostile. His critique of caste and of the Brahminical intellectual tradition that legitimized it included a critique of figures like Tagore who, in Ambedkar's view, did not take the question of

caste seriously enough in their social philosophy. But Ambedkar's own philosophical project, culminating in his conversion to Buddhism and his reinterpretation of Buddhist philosophy as a framework for human emancipation that transcends both the Hindu tradition and the Marxian tradition, represents one of the most significant philosophical contributions of twentieth-century Indian thought. For the Bengali Marxian tradition, engaging seriously with Ambedkar's philosophical legacy is not optional: it is a requirement of intellectual honesty and of the tradition's own commitment to understanding the full complexity of the social reality it seeks to analyze.

11.3 Post-Structuralism and the Bengali Literary Tradition

The encounter between the Marxian tradition and post-structuralist theory has been one of the most productive and most contested intellectual developments in the humanities over the past four decades. The question of how to read the relationship between Marxism and post-structuralism in the Bengali context requires attention to the specific ways in which post-structuralist frameworks have entered the Bengali intellectual world, and to the specific contributions and limitations they offer for the analysis of Bengali literature and culture.

Post-structuralist theory, associated with figures like Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Lacan, entered Bengali intellectual life primarily through the mediation of the Subaltern Studies collective, which was founded in the early 1980s and which brought together historians, literary scholars, and social scientists committed to writing history "from below," from the perspective of the subaltern classes and groups whose experience and agency the dominant historiography had marginalized or silenced. The Subaltern Studies project drew simultaneously on Marxian historiography, Gramscian cultural theory, and the post-structuralist attention to discourse, representation, and the politics of knowledge. The resulting approach was neither straightforwardly Marxian nor straightforwardly post-structuralist but a specific and sometimes uneasy synthesis of the two.

For the Bengali Marxian literary tradition, the encounter with post-structuralism has been productive in several respects. The post-structuralist attention to the politics of representation, to the ways in which language and discourse produce as well as reflect social reality, has enriched the tradition's analysis of how literary texts participate in the construction and contestation of ideological frameworks. The Foucauldian analysis of power as dispersed through social relations rather than concentrated in a single sovereign authority has helped the tradition to analyze the specific forms of power that operate within Bengali literary culture, beyond the relatively simple model of class power as the ultimate explanation for all forms of domination. And the post-structuralist critique of the sovereign subject, of the idea of a unified, self-transparent human consciousness as the origin of meaning and value, has forced the tradition to rethink its often implicit assumptions about literary agency and authorial intention.

But the encounter has also produced tensions and resistances that are themselves intellectually productive. The Marxian tradition's commitment to understanding literature in relation to material social conditions is in tension with the post-structuralist tendency to treat discourse and representation as relatively autonomous from material reality. The Marxian commitment to the possibility of truth and the importance of ideological critique is in tension with the post-

structuralist skepticism about truth claims and its understanding of all knowledge as power-inflected. And the Marxian commitment to political transformation as the ultimate goal of intellectual work is in tension with the post-structuralist tendency to deconstruct political categories in ways that can make political action seem impossible or incoherent.

The best response to these tensions, for the Bengali Marxian tradition, is neither the wholesale adoption of post-structuralist frameworks nor their wholesale rejection, but the kind of critical dialogue that takes what is genuinely illuminating in the post-structuralist tradition while maintaining the Marxian commitments that give the tradition its political direction and its analytical rigor.

CHAPTER TWELVE: CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The Meaning of a Life in Thought

12.1 What an Intellectual Life Means

We have traveled a long distance in Part Nine of this textbook, from the analysis of the political conjuncture to the philosophy of praxis, from the rights of minority scholars to the pedagogy of Marxian literary criticism, from the challenge of digital capitalism to the prospect of the tradition's renewal. Before we conclude, it is worth stepping back from the specific discussions and asking a more general and more personal question: what does it mean to live a life in thought, and what does that life mean for the world?

The intellectual life is, in its deepest sense, a life of care: care for ideas, care for the truth, care for the students and readers whose understanding one's work is meant to serve, and care for the world whose transformation one's thought aspires to contribute to. This care is not merely an emotion but a form of practical commitment: a sustained, disciplined, long-term dedication to the difficult work of understanding that is inseparable from the personal qualities of patience, honesty, courage, and intellectual humility.

For Abdul Kafi, the intellectual life has been practiced in a specific institutional context, within a specific cultural tradition, under specific political conditions, and with specific scholarly tools and frameworks. But the meaning of that life is not exhausted by these specific conditions. It connects to something more fundamental: the human desire to understand, the human commitment to truth, and the human hope that understanding can contribute, however modestly, to the betterment of the conditions under which human beings live.

The Bengali Marxian tradition that Abdul Kafi represents is, at its best, a tradition that takes this connection seriously. It understands that the analysis of a literary text is not merely an academic exercise but an act of cultural interpretation that contributes to the broader project of human self-understanding. It understands that the critique of ideology is not merely a theoretical procedure but a practical contribution to the development of the critical consciousness that political transformation requires. And it understands that the transmission of a tradition to the next

generation is not merely a professional responsibility but a form of care for the future: an act of faith in the possibility that the work of understanding can continue and that the insights achieved by one generation can be preserved and developed by the next.

These are not small things. In the face of the specific pressures and challenges of the current moment, they represent genuine achievements and genuine resources. The tradition that Abdul Kafi embodies and sustains is imperfect, as all human traditions are imperfect. It has blind spots and limitations that we have attempted to identify honestly in the course of this textbook. But it also has genuine strengths and genuine insights that make it worth defending, worth developing, and worth transmitting to those who will carry it forward.

12.2 The Scholarly Text as Historical Document

One final dimension of the tradition deserves acknowledgment before we close. The texts produced by scholars like Abdul Kafi, the essays and monographs that constitute their visible intellectual production, are not only contributions to ongoing debates in their specific fields. They are also historical documents: records of a specific intellectual and cultural moment that will be of interest to future scholars trying to understand what it meant to be a committed Bengali Marxian literary critic in the early twenty-first century.

This is not a trivial point. The history of ideas is made not only by the major theoretical contributions that change the direction of entire fields but by the accumulated body of specific, grounded, particular intellectual work that constitutes the living practice of a tradition. The essays and books that the scholars of a tradition produce in the course of their regular intellectual work are the material from which future intellectual historians will reconstruct the texture of intellectual life in a specific time and place. They record the specific questions that seemed most pressing, the specific frameworks that seemed most adequate, the specific texts that seemed most significant, and the specific forms of argument that seemed most persuasive.

In this sense, the work of Abdul Kafi and his colleagues at the Centre for Marxian Studies constitutes a contribution not only to the present understanding of Bengali Marxian literary culture but to the future understanding of what it meant to think seriously about literature, politics, and human emancipation in Bengal and India in the early twenty-first century. This is itself a reason to take that work seriously, to study it carefully, and to transmit it faithfully to the next generation of scholars who will need its resources as they face the challenges of their own moment.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR PART NINE

1. Analyze the concept of the "conjuncture" as Gramsci and Stuart Hall use it, and apply it to the specific situation of the Bengali Marxian tradition in the mid-2020s. What are the most important features of the current conjuncture, and what do they require of intellectuals working in this tradition?

2. Examine the argument that neoliberal academic governance poses a fundamental threat not only to the material conditions of academic work but to the intellectual quality of that work. What specific mechanisms connect the neoliberal transformation of the university to the quality of intellectual production? Is the threat reversible?
3. Evaluate the adequacy of the classical Marxian framework for understanding caste in Bengali and Indian society. What specific dimensions of caste-based oppression does the framework illuminate, and what dimensions does it fail to capture? How might Ambedkarite thought be integrated into the Marxian framework without reducing either to the other?
4. Discuss the concept of social reproduction theory and its implications for the analysis of Bengali literature. Identify specific texts in the Bengali literary canon and analyze what a social reproduction framework reveals about them that a classical Marxian class analysis does not.
5. Examine the relationship between digital capitalism and the political economy of knowledge. What specific forms of value extraction operate in the digital economy, and how do they affect the conditions of intellectual production for scholars working in non-dominant languages like Bengali?
6. Analyze the concept of "immanent critique" as a method in literary analysis. How does it differ from other forms of Marxian literary criticism? Apply it to a specific Bengali literary text and evaluate the results.
7. Evaluate the argument that academic freedom is best protected not by constitutional guarantees alone but by the combination of legal frameworks with strong institutional, professional, and cultural mechanisms. What specific improvements to these mechanisms are most urgently needed in the current Indian context?
8. Discuss the psychological dimensions of intellectual vocation under conditions of political hostility and institutional pressure. What specific psychological resources and strategies are available to scholars who face such conditions? What are the limits of psychological resilience as a response to structural threats?
9. Examine the relationship between feminist theory and the Bengali Marxian literary tradition. What specific feminist insights are most relevant to the analysis of Bengali literature? What institutional changes would be required to make the tradition more fully inclusive of feminist perspectives?
10. Assess the prospects for the renewal of the Bengali Marxian literary tradition in the current period. What are the most important resources available for this renewal? What are the most significant obstacles? What specific intellectual and political strategies would be most effective in addressing those obstacles?
11. Develop a comparative analysis of the philosophical positions of Tagore, Vivekananda, and Ambedkar with respect to the question of social emancipation. How does each position relate to the Marxian framework? What does each position illuminate that the others tend to obscure?
12. Examine the question of what it means to practice ecological Marxism in the specific context of Bengal. What specific ecological challenges face the Bengali population, and what specific resources does the ecological Marxian framework provide for analyzing and responding to those challenges? What modifications to existing ecological Marxist frameworks would be necessary to make them fully adequate to the specific conditions of the Bengali delta region?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

On the Indian political conjuncture and Hindu nationalism: Christophe Jaffrelot's "Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy" provides the most comprehensive scholarly analysis. Romila Thapar's collected essays on Indian history and the Hindu nationalist rewriting of that history are essential. Arundhati Roy's "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness" provides a fictional but deeply researched and politically significant engagement with the current conjuncture.

On neoliberal academic governance: Stefan Collini's "What Are Universities For?" is the most important recent defense of the humanities against the neoliberal critique. Christopher Newfield's "The Great Mistake: How We Wrecked Public Universities and How We Can Fix Them" provides the most thorough analysis of the specific mechanisms by which neoliberal reform has damaged university quality. Wendy Brown's "Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution" provides the most important theoretical analysis of the relationship between neoliberalism and democratic culture.

On feminist theory and social reproduction: Tithi Bhattacharya's edited volume "Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression" is the essential contemporary text. Silvia Federici's "Caliban and the Witch" provides the historical foundations. Nancy Fraser's "Fortunes of Feminism" provides the most important theoretical overview.

On anti-caste thought and Ambedkar: Ambedkar's "Annihilation of Caste" (with annotations by Arundhati Roy) remains the essential primary text. Kancha Ilaiah's "Why I Am Not a Hindu" provides the most important contemporary expression of anti-caste critique from within the Dalit perspective. Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai's "The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory" provides the most sophisticated philosophical engagement with the relationship between Dalit thought and academic theory.

On ecological Marxism: John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark, and Richard York's "The Ecological Rift" extends Foster's earlier analysis of the metabolic rift to the contemporary ecological crisis. Jason Moore's "Capitalism in the Web of Life" provides the most ambitious recent attempt to develop an ecological Marxism adequate to the twenty-first century. Amitav Ghosh's "The Nutmeg's Curse" extends his earlier analysis of climate change to the broader history of colonialism and ecological destruction.

On digital capitalism and the political economy of knowledge: Shoshana Zuboff's "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism" provides the most comprehensive account of the specific form of value extraction that characterizes platform capitalism. Nick Dyer-Witheford's "Cyber-Marx" provides the most important Marxian analysis of digital capitalism from a specifically Marxian perspective. Evgeny Morozov's "The Net Delusion" provides a sharp critique of the ideology of digital liberation.

On jurisprudence and academic freedom in India: Gautam Bhatia's "The Transformative Constitution: A Radical Biography in Nine Acts" provides the most important recent analysis of the Indian Constitution's progressive potential. Rohini Hensman's "Indefensible: Democracy, Counterterrorism, and the Ethics of Torture" examines the use of law to suppress dissent in India and globally. The Annual Reports of the Indian Civil Liberties Union and the Academics for Academic Freedom provide current documentation of threats to academic freedom.

On critical pedagogy: Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" remains the foundational text. Henry Giroux's "Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope" provides the most important American development of Freire's framework. bell hooks' "Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom" provides the most important feminist engagement with critical pedagogy. Antonia Darder's "Reinventing Paulo Freire: A Pedagogy of Love" provides the most recent and comprehensive assessment of Freire's legacy.

On the philosophy of praxis: Carol Gould's "Marx's Social Ontology" provides the most important philosophical reconstruction of Marx's concept of praxis. Lukacs' "History and Class Consciousness" remains the most powerful early twentieth-century elaboration of the concept. Jurgen Habermas' "Theory of Communicative Action" provides the most important critical development and critique of the praxis tradition from within the Frankfurt School heritage.

APPENDIX TO PART NINE: KEY CONCEPTS IN THE ANALYSIS OF INTELLECTUAL TRADITIONS AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

CONJUNCTURAL ANALYSIS: A method developed within the Althusserian and Gramscian traditions for analyzing the specific configuration of forces, contradictions, and possibilities that characterizes a particular historical moment. Conjunctural analysis insists that political and intellectual intervention must be responsive to the specific conditions of the present rather than applying general formulas derived from abstract theory.

CULTURAL HEGEMONY: Gramsci's concept describing the way in which the dominant class maintains its power not only through coercive force but through the achievement of the "spontaneous consent" of the dominated classes. Hegemony operates through the naturalization of the values, assumptions, and common sense of the dominant class, making the existing social order appear inevitable and rational. Counter-hegemonic work seeks to challenge this naturalization and to build alternative forms of common sense.

DIGITAL ENCLOSURE: The process by which capital colonizes the digital commons, converting previously open and accessible information spaces into sites of commodification and value extraction. Digital enclosure operates through intellectual property law, platform monopolization, and the conversion of user-generated data into raw material for capitalist production.

IMMANENT CRITIQUE: A philosophical method, associated with the Hegelian-Marxian tradition and developed especially by Adorno and Horkheimer, that evaluates a practice, text, or

social institution by the standards it itself claims to embody. Immanent critique exposes the contradictions between the claims an object makes and its actual character, using the object's own logic to reveal its limitations.

METABOLIC RIFT: A concept developed by John Bellamy Foster, drawing on Marx's analysis of capitalist agriculture, to describe the disruption of the natural metabolic relationship between human society and the earth that capitalist production produces. The metabolic rift refers to the physical separation of the products of human labor from the natural cycles through which soil fertility and other natural resources are replenished, extended in contemporary ecological Marxism to describe the broader disruption of earth-system cycles by capitalist production.

ORGANIC INTELLECTUAL: Gramsci's term for the intellectual who emerges from within a specific social class and who functions to help that class develop its own understanding of its situation and its own capacity for self-organization and political leadership. Distinguished from the "traditional" intellectual who maintains the appearance of class neutrality while actually serving the interests of the dominant class.

SOCIAL REPRODUCTION: The processes through which human labor power and social relations are reproduced from one day to the next and from one generation to the next. Social reproduction theory insists that capitalism depends not only on the exploitation of wage labor in the formal economy but on the unpaid reproductive labor performed primarily by women in the domestic sphere, and that the analysis of capitalism must include this reproductive sphere as well as the formal sphere of production.

STRUCTURAL ANTI-DISCRIMINATION: An approach to the protection of minority rights that addresses the systemic and structural dimensions of discrimination rather than focusing only on individual incidents of prejudicial treatment. Distinguished from individual rights frameworks by its attention to the institutional arrangements, cultural practices, and implicit assumptions that produce patterns of disadvantage independent of the intentions of specific individual actors.

SUBALTERN CONSCIOUSNESS: A concept developed by the Subaltern Studies collective, drawing on Gramsci's concept of the subaltern, to describe the forms of consciousness, knowledge, and agency of those social groups whose experience has been systematically excluded from dominant historical and cultural narratives. Subaltern consciousness is not simply the absence of dominant consciousness but a specific form of knowing and acting that the dominant frameworks cannot fully capture.

SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM: Shoshana Zuboff's term for the specific form of capitalism represented by digital platform corporations like Google and Facebook, in which value is extracted from the behavioral data produced by users of digital services, rather than from the labor power of workers or the value of material commodities. Surveillance capitalism produces what Zuboff calls "prediction products" sold to advertisers, rather than conventional commodities sold to consumers.

WAR OF POSITION: Gramsci's term for the political strategy appropriate to societies with strong civil institutions and complex hegemonic structures, in which the transformation of

society proceeds through the long, patient, contested work of building counter-hegemonic cultural institutions, practices, and forms of consciousness, rather than through the direct frontal assault on state power that Gramsci calls the "war of maneuver."

Part Ten of this textbook will address: The Complete Legacy: A Critical Assessment of Abdul Kafi's Contribution to Bengali Intellectual Life, Marxian Scholarship, and the Global South's Engagement with the Human Sciences.

End of Part Nine

A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY AND SCHOLARLY RESPONSIBILITY

Part Nine has engaged with questions that are inherently difficult to treat with the empirical certainty that scholarly analysis ideally requires. The future of any intellectual tradition is uncertain. The psychological life of any individual scholar is largely inaccessible to outside observation. The specific institutional dynamics of any university are known only partially to those who observe from outside. And the political developments that will shape the conditions of intellectual work in India over the coming years are, by definition, not yet determined.

In the face of these uncertainties, we have tried to maintain the highest standard of intellectual honesty: acknowledging what we do not know, being clear about when we are speculating or extrapolating rather than reporting established facts, and being willing to reach conclusions that are uncomfortable or uncertain rather than retreating to the safety of vague generality. This is the standard that the tradition we are studying has always tried to hold itself to, and it is the standard that any responsible intellectual engagement with that tradition requires.

The great Bengali Marxian literary tradition, of which Abdul Kafi's career is a part, has always understood that intellectual honesty is itself a form of political commitment. To be honest about the limitations of one's frameworks, the difficulties of one's situation, and the uncertainty of one's prospects is not a counsel of despair. It is a form of respect for the complexity of the world and for the intelligence of the readers and students with whom one shares one's thinking. It is, in the deepest sense, a practice of the intellectual values that the tradition claims to embody.

End of Part Nine

PART TEN: THE COMPLETE LEGACY

A Critical Assessment of Abdul Kafi's Contribution to Bengali Intellectual Life, Marxian Scholarship, and the Global South's Engagement with the Human Sciences

PREFACE TO PART TEN

We arrive, in this final Part of our textbook, at the most demanding and the most reflective task that any sustained intellectual biography must eventually undertake: the task of assessment. Parts One through Nine have been, in different proportions and through different methods, acts of description, analysis, and contextualization. We have traced the institutional history within which Abdul Kafi's work is embedded. We have examined the philosophical traditions that shape his intellectual commitments. We have analyzed the specific texts around which his major scholarly contributions are organized. We have placed him within the comparative framework of global Marxian literary thought. We have examined the psychological, institutional, pedagogical, legal, and political dimensions of his situation. And we have asked, in Part Nine, what the future of the tradition he represents might look like.

In Part Ten, we attempt something different: a comprehensive critical assessment of what Abdul Kafi's work, life, and institutional role amount to as a contribution to intellectual history. This assessment must be genuinely critical in the philosophical sense: it must not merely celebrate or condemn but evaluate with the rigor, the honesty, and the care that serious intellectual engagement requires. It must acknowledge both the genuine achievements and the genuine limitations. It must situate those achievements and limitations within the broadest possible intellectual context, asking not only what Abdul Kafi has contributed to the specific field of Bengali Marxian literary criticism but what that contribution means for the larger questions about knowledge, culture, politics, and human emancipation that have animated this textbook throughout.

The final part also has a synthetic function. Having moved through nine parts of sustained and detailed analysis, the reader deserves an attempt to bring the different threads together into a coherent and comprehensive picture. What, when all is said and done, is the significance of this scholar, this tradition, and this set of questions for the contemporary world? What does the study of Abdul Kafi teach us not only about Bengali literary culture and Marxian scholarship but about the broader questions of intellectual vocation, political commitment, and the relationship between thought and life that any serious study of an intellectual figure must ultimately address?

These are large questions, and Part Ten does not pretend to answer them definitively. But it approaches them with the conviction that the attempt to answer them honestly, even if imperfectly, is itself a contribution to the kind of serious intellectual engagement that the tradition we have been studying at its best represents.

CHAPTER ONE: THE ARCHITECTURE OF A SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTION

Mapping the Territory of Abdul Kafi's Intellectual Achievement

1.1 The Problem of Assessment in Intellectual Biography

Before undertaking the assessment that Part Ten promises, we need to think carefully about what assessment means in the context of intellectual biography and why it is difficult. The difficulty is not simply that we lack information about Abdul Kafi's work, though the relative inaccessibility of his Bengali-language publications to non-Bengali readers is a real constraint on the depth of analysis that any external assessment can achieve. The difficulty is more fundamental: it concerns the criteria by which intellectual achievement should be evaluated and the relationship between those criteria and the specific context within which the work is produced.

The most obvious criteria of scholarly achievement in the contemporary academic world are those imposed by the metric-based evaluation systems that we discussed critically in Part Nine: citation counts, impact factor, grant income, international publications, and conference invitations. By these criteria, a scholar like Abdul Kafi who writes primarily in Bengali, publishes primarily with Indian publishers for an Indian audience, and derives his institutional significance primarily from his role as a teacher and as the coordinator of an interdisciplinary centre rather than from a large international publication record, might appear to be a figure of limited scholarly achievement. This appearance would be profoundly misleading, and part of the purpose of this final assessment is to explain why.

The criteria of scholarly achievement that are appropriate for evaluating the work of a committed vernacular intellectual in the Bengali Marxian tradition are not those of the global academic mainstream. They are criteria derived from the specific values and commitments of the tradition itself: the depth and rigor of the engagement with specific literary texts, the sophistication of the theoretical framework brought to bear on those texts, the quality of the teaching and institutional work through which the tradition is sustained and transmitted, the courage and integrity of the political commitments that give the scholarly work its orientation, and the contribution to the specific intellectual community that the scholar serves. By these criteria, the assessment of Abdul Kafi's achievement looks very different from what the metric-based systems would suggest.

This is not a relativist argument: it is not the claim that all criteria are equally valid or that there is no basis for evaluating scholarly work across different traditions and contexts. It is the argument that the evaluation of any intellectual contribution must be conducted in relation to the specific goals and values that the contribution is intended to serve, and that the imposition of criteria derived from a different set of goals and values produces not a universal evaluation but a specifically situated one that reflects the power relations of the global academic world as much as the intrinsic quality of the work being evaluated.

1.2 The Three Dimensions of the Contribution

Abdul Kafi's contribution to intellectual life can be organized along three major dimensions, each of which deserves sustained assessment in its own right, and each of which is connected to the others in ways that make it impossible to assess any one dimension in isolation from the rest.

The first dimension is the strictly scholarly: the contribution to the interpretation and understanding of specific Bengali literary texts and to the broader theoretical questions of Marxian literary criticism. This is the most conventionally academic dimension of the

contribution, and it is the one that is most directly accessible through the written record of his publications. The central text here is his book published by the National Book Agency, organized around three texts that are central to the tradition of Bengali leftist literary culture: the journal *Langol*, the play *Raktakarobi*, and the journal *Dhumketu*. The assessment of this contribution requires asking what specific insights the analyses in these essays achieve, what theoretical frameworks they develop or apply, and what they contribute to the broader understanding of Bengali literary history and Marxian literary theory.

The second dimension is the institutional: the contribution to the intellectual life of Jadavpur University and to the broader academic community through the coordination of the Centre for Marxian Studies and through the organizational work of teaching, departmental administration, and cultural programming. This dimension of the contribution is less visible than the publications but is in many ways equally important. The Centre for Marxian Studies, under Abdul Kafi's coordination, has maintained a space for serious interdisciplinary engagement with the Marxian tradition that is genuinely unusual in the contemporary Indian academic landscape. The seminars, lectures, and events organized by the Centre have brought together scholars of international significance in dialogues that have enriched the intellectual life of Jadavpur and contributed to the broader development of Marxian scholarship in India.

The third dimension is the representational: what Abdul Kafi represents as a figure, as a presence, as an example of a specific kind of intellectual vocation in a specific historical and political context. This dimension is the most difficult to assess by conventional scholarly criteria, but it is in some ways the most significant. The significance of an intellectual figure is not exhausted by their publications or their institutional role. It also includes what they stand for, what their presence in a specific institutional context means for the culture of that institution, and what their example means for those who encounter it. As a Muslim Bengali Marxist scholar at one of India's most distinguished universities, at a time when all three of those identities are under various forms of political and cultural pressure, Abdul Kafi's continued practice of committed scholarly work is itself a form of intellectual and political statement.

1.3 The Textual Achievement: A Deep Assessment

The assessment of Abdul Kafi's textual achievement requires engaging directly with the scholarly content of his major publications, which center on three texts that are among the most politically and culturally significant in the history of Bengali leftist literary culture: the revolutionary newspaper *Langol*, Rabindranath Tagore's play *Raktakarobi*, and the journal *Dhumketu* associated with the poet Kazi Nazrul Islam.

The choice of these three texts is itself intellectually significant and deserves assessment before we turn to the specific analyses. *Langol* was a Bengali-language newspaper published in 1925 under the editorship of Kazi Nazrul Islam, with the backing of the emerging communist and peasant movement in Bengal. The name, meaning "plough" in Bengali, signals the journal's commitment to the peasantry and to the agrarian dimensions of the revolutionary movement. *Langol* represented the first sustained attempt to bring Marxian political ideas to a Bengali-language popular readership, and its publication history, though brief, was politically and culturally significant. It published poems, essays, and political analysis that connected the

international communist movement to the specific conditions of the Bengal peasantry, and it represents a moment of crystallization in the long process through which Marxian ideas were translated into the specific cultural and political idiom of Bengal.

Raktakarobi, as we have discussed in detail in earlier parts of this textbook, is Tagore's most politically explicit play: a work that stages the conflict between the logic of accumulation and extraction, represented by the nameless King who controls the mines, and the principle of life, creativity, and human wholeness, represented by the figure of Nandini. The choice to center a Marxian literary analysis on this Tagore play is itself a significant interpretive decision, because it implies a specific reading of the relationship between Tagore's literary vision and the Marxian tradition: a reading that sees Tagore not as an idealist humanist opposed to the materialist concerns of Marxism but as a thinker whose literary imagination independently arrives at a critique of capitalist logic that resonates deeply with the Marxian analysis.

Dhumketu was a newspaper also associated with Kazi Nazrul Islam, published in the early 1920s, whose bold, confrontational political writing earned it the attentions of the colonial censors and eventually resulted in Nazrul's imprisonment. The name, meaning "comet," signals the paper's commitment to blazing a radical path through the cultural and political landscape of colonial Bengal. Dhumketu's significance lies not only in its political content but in the specific literary form that Nazrul brought to political journalism: a form that combined the rhetorical power of Bengali devotional poetry with the urgency of revolutionary political address, creating a new kind of politically engaged popular writing that had no precedent in the Bengali literary tradition.

By choosing to analyze these three texts together, Abdul Kafi makes a specific argument about the Bengali Marxian tradition: that it is not a tradition that begins with the formal establishment of left political parties in the 1920s and 1930s but one that has deep roots in the specific literary and journalistic culture of the revolutionary period, roots that connect the Marxian tradition to the broader humanist and nationalist ferments of early twentieth-century Bengali culture. This argument has significant implications for how we understand the relationship between Marxism and the Bengali literary tradition, and for how we assess the contribution of specific writers like Tagore and Nazrul Islam to the development of a specifically Bengali form of Marxian thought.

CHAPTER TWO: LANGOL AND THE POLITICS OF AGRARIAN REVOLUTION

A Deep Reading of Abdul Kafi's Textual Engagement

2.1 The Historical Significance of Langol

To understand Abdul Kafi's analysis of Langol, we need first to understand the historical significance of the journal in the context of 1920s Bengal. The early 1920s were a period of extraordinary political ferment in India and in Bengal specifically. The Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920 to 1922 had mobilized millions of Indians under Gandhi's leadership against colonial rule, but its abrupt withdrawal after the Chauri Chaura incident of 1922, when Gandhi

called off the movement following the killing of police officers by a crowd, had left a political vacuum that the more radical forces of the Indian left were eager to fill. The founding of the Communist Party of India in 1920, the growing influence of the Peasant and Worker parties in the provinces, and the increasing radicalization of the trade union movement all reflected the emergence of a new kind of politics that went beyond the liberal nationalism of the Congress mainstream.

In Bengal, this political ferment took a specific cultural form. The Bengali literary and intellectual tradition, with its long history of engagement between cultural production and political transformation, was a natural site for the expression and development of the emerging radical politics. Figures like Kazi Nazrul Islam, who combined extraordinary poetic gifts with fierce political commitment, became the cultural voice of this new radicalism, writing poems, songs, and essays that spoke directly to the conditions of the Bengali working class and peasantry in a language that was both aesthetically powerful and politically urgent.

Langol was the institutional expression of this cultural radicalism. Founded in 1925 with the support of the Peasant Labour Party, the journal attempted to create a Bengali-language vehicle for the Marxian political analysis that was, at that time, primarily available only in English or in European languages. This was a genuinely ambitious project: it required not only the translation of Marxian political concepts into Bengali but their adaptation to the specific cultural and political idiom of a Bengali working-class and peasant readership. The challenge was not simply linguistic: it was cultural and philosophical. How do you explain the concept of surplus value to a Bengal peasant in a language and through examples that are drawn from their own experience? How do you connect the international communist movement, with its origins in the industrial capitalism of Europe, to the specific conditions of an agrarian economy still largely shaped by colonial land tenure arrangements?

2.2 Abdul Kafi's Analytical Framework for Langol

Abdul Kafi's analysis of Langol engages with these questions through a framework that combines close reading of specific texts published in the journal with a broader historical and theoretical analysis of the role of political journalism in the development of revolutionary consciousness. The analysis draws on the Gramscian concept of the organic intellectual, asking how Langol represents an attempt to create specifically Bengali organic intellectuals of the peasant and worker movement: intellectuals who emerge from within the subaltern classes, who speak their language, and who help them to understand and articulate their own situation and their own aspirations.

This framework is particularly well suited to the analysis of Langol because the journal's distinctive character lay precisely in its attempt to create a new kind of political writing that was genuinely organic to the Bengali subaltern world rather than simply translating European Marxian theory into Bengali. Nazrul Islam's writing in Langol is not a translation of Marxism but a specific Bengali cultural form of Marxian commitment: one that draws on the resources of Bengali devotional poetry, on the tradition of Bengali folk music, on the specific imagery of the Bengal landscape, and on the specific concerns of the Bengal peasantry to create a political

discourse that is Marxian in its analysis of class and exploitation but specifically Bengali in its cultural form and its emotional register.

The most important theoretical contribution of Abdul Kafi's analysis, at least as it can be reconstructed from what we know of his broader scholarly commitments, is the argument that *Langol* represents not simply a political document but a specifically literary achievement: a moment in the history of Bengali literature when the resources of the literary tradition are mobilized for the purposes of revolutionary political education, and in doing so create something genuinely new. The language of *Langol* is not the language of political pamphlets: it is a language shaped by the same attention to rhythm, imagery, and emotional power that characterizes the best Bengali lyric poetry. To read *Langol* only as political journalism, without attention to its literary dimensions, is to miss something essential about what made it politically effective and about what it contributes to the Bengali literary tradition.

2.3 The Peasantry, the Intelligentsia, and the Problem of Representation

One of the most fundamental questions that *Langol* raises, and that Abdul Kafi's analysis must address, is the question of representation: who speaks for the peasantry, and in whose language? Nazrul Islam and the other intellectuals who contributed to *Langol* were not themselves peasants. They were Bengali intellectuals of the urban educated class who had committed themselves to the cause of the peasant and worker movement but who spoke from a position that was inevitably shaped by their own class experience and their own cultural formation. This raises the classic problem of representation in political and cultural life: the problem of who has the authority to speak for those who cannot or do not speak for themselves within the dominant cultural institutions, and what the implications of that authority for the character and the politics of the representation.

This is a problem that the Subaltern Studies tradition has examined with great sophistication in the context of Indian historiography, and Abdul Kafi's engagement with it in the context of *Langol* connects his analysis to that broader theoretical debate. The Subaltern Studies argument, associated especially with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's intervention in the debate, is that the subaltern cannot simply speak: they can only speak through the mediating frameworks and institutions of the dominant culture, and that mediation always transforms and potentially distorts the experience and the aspirations it claims to represent. Applied to *Langol*, this argument would suggest that the journal's representation of the Bengali peasantry is inevitably shaped by the cultural frameworks and the class position of the urban intellectuals who produced it, even if those intellectuals were genuinely committed to the peasant cause.

Abdul Kafi's response to this argument, in so far as we can reconstruct it from his broader scholarly commitments, is likely to be a nuanced one that acknowledges the reality of the representational problem without succumbing to the political paralysis that the most radical version of the Spivakian argument can produce. The argument that the subaltern cannot speak, taken to its logical extreme, would make any attempt at political representation of the subaltern classes impossible, and would therefore serve the interests of those who benefit from the silence of the subaltern. The Gramscian tradition that Abdul Kafi works within insists that the problem of representation is real but not insuperable: that the organic intellectual, who is genuinely

embedded in the life and struggles of the class they serve, can achieve a form of representation that is authentic even if it is never complete or unproblematic. The question is not whether representation is possible but what conditions of production, what commitments of practice, and what forms of accountability make it more or less adequate to the experience and the aspirations it seeks to express.

CHAPTER THREE: RAKTAKAROBI AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERATION

Tagore's Political Aesthetics and the Marxian Interpretation

3.1 The Problem of Reading Tagore as a Marxian Text

The decision to read Raktakarobi through a Marxian critical framework is itself philosophically significant and philosophically controversial. Tagore was not a Marxist. He was explicitly critical of the Bolshevik experiment in the Soviet Union, which he visited in 1930 and assessed with characteristically nuanced ambivalence. He was deeply skeptical of the mechanistic materialism that characterized much of the Marxism of his time, and his own philosophical framework, rooted in the Upanishadic tradition and in the humanist universalism that he developed through his lifelong engagement with literature, music, and philosophy, was in many respects fundamentally different from the materialist philosophy that Marx articulated.

And yet there is something genuine and important in the attempt to read Raktakarobi through a Marxian lens, and Abdul Kafi's scholarly project is organized around the claim that this reading yields genuine intellectual insight. The claim is not the reductive one that Tagore was "really" a Marxist who did not know it, or that his literary vision can be reduced to a set of Marxian political theses. It is the more sophisticated claim that the Marxian theoretical framework illuminates specific dimensions of the play that a purely aesthetic or biographical reading cannot capture, and that the play in turn illuminates specific dimensions of the Marxian analysis that a purely theoretical presentation cannot achieve.

The specific Marxian insight that Raktakarobi most vividly illuminates is the analysis of what Marx called commodity fetishism: the process by which the social relations between human beings are disguised and distorted by the form of the commodity, appearing as relations between things rather than between people. In the world of the play, the King's obsession with the gold that his mines produce is not simply greed in the ordinary sense: it is a specifically modern form of value obsession in which the accumulation of a specific form of wealth has displaced all other human values and has turned human beings themselves into instruments of production. The miners who work in the King's mines are not simply exploited laborers in the conventional economic sense: they are human beings who have been transformed, in the logic of the system, into means of production, into instruments for the extraction of the mineral wealth that the King accumulates. The fact that Tagore does not use the Marxian vocabulary to describe this process does not mean that the Marxian analysis is irrelevant. It means that the Marxian analysis can illuminate features of the play that the play's own vocabulary does not make explicit.

3.2 Nandini as the Figure of Counter-Value

The figure of Nandini in *Raktakarobi* is one of the most powerful and most discussed characters in the Bengali theatrical tradition. She represents, in the symbolic economy of the play, the principle of life against the principle of death: the world of color, movement, song, and human connection against the world of extraction, accumulation, and instrumental rationality. Her relationship with the miners, who are drawn to her as to a source of vitality and warmth that their underground work denies them, is a relationship of counter-value: she offers them access to dimensions of human experience that the logic of the King's system systematically excludes.

Abdul Kafi's analysis of Nandini within a Marxian framework requires engaging with the question of what Nandini's symbolic function in the play represents in terms of the categories of historical materialism. Is she simply an idealized figure of humanist universalism, a symbol of the human wholeness that capitalism destroys? Or does she represent something more historically specific: a form of social life and social relation that capitalism actually destroys in the process of primitive accumulation, a way of being human that is not simply an abstract aspiration but a historical reality that capitalist development has displaced?

This question connects to the important debate in Marxian theory about the relationship between capitalism and the forms of pre-capitalist social life that it destroys. Marx himself, in the *Grundrisse* and in *Capital*, was ambivalent about pre-capitalist social forms: he recognized both their destructive supersession by capitalism and the genuine human values that they embodied and that capitalism destroys. The question of what a socialist future would preserve, develop, and transform from the pre-capitalist past is one that has haunted the Marxian tradition from the beginning, and *Raktakarobi*'s symbolic representation of the conflict between Nandini's world and the King's system can be read as a literary staging of exactly this question.

3.3 The Theatrical Form and its Political Implications

One of the most important dimensions of Abdul Kafi's analysis of *Raktakarobi* is the attention it pays to the theatrical form of the play, rather than treating the play simply as a vehicle for its thematic content. The specific form of Tagore's symbolic theater, with its departure from the conventions of naturalistic representation, its use of lyrical language, its employment of symbolic rather than psychologically individualized characters, and its blurring of the boundaries between drama, music, and poetry, is not incidental to the play's political meaning. It is constitutive of it.

The connection between theatrical form and political meaning was a central concern of the Marxian debate about aesthetics in the twentieth century, most famously in the debate between Brecht and Lukacs over the relative merits of realism and modernism as forms of politically committed art. Brecht's argument, which is in some respects more applicable to Tagore's theatrical practice than to the European naturalism that Lukacs championed, was that the conventional theatrical forms of naturalistic representation depoliticize the audience by encouraging identification with the characters and absorption in the narrative, producing a form of aesthetic pleasure that functions as a form of ideology rather than as a challenge to it. The alienation effect that Brecht advocated, the use of theatrical devices that create distance between the audience and the action, preventing identification and stimulating critical reflection, was

designed to produce a different kind of theatrical experience: one that maintains the audience's critical awareness rather than suspending it.

Tagore's theatrical practice in *Raktakarobi* is not identical to Brecht's, but it shares with it a commitment to using the non-naturalistic possibilities of theater to create a form of aesthetic experience that is not simply pleasurable but challenging, not simply absorbing but illuminating. The play's symbolic characters, its lyrical language, its ritual elements, and its open-ended conclusion all work to prevent the kind of narrative closure that naturalistic theater typically provides and to keep the audience in a state of sustained interrogation rather than satisfied resolution. This theatrical strategy is not merely an aesthetic preference: it is a form of political pedagogy, a way of using the resources of art to produce in the audience the quality of critical awareness that political transformation requires.

3.4 The Universal and the Particular in Tagore's Political Vision

A persistent challenge for any Marxian reading of Tagore is the question of the relationship between the universal and the particular in his political vision. Tagore's humanism is explicitly universalist: it aspires to a vision of humanity that transcends the divisions of nation, religion, class, and caste in the name of a universal humanity that is the common ground of all human beings. This universalism is in many respects admirable and politically important, particularly in the context of the communalist politics of colonial India. But it is also, from the perspective of the Marxian tradition, philosophically problematic: it risks abstracting from the specific material conditions of exploitation and oppression that produce the divisions it seeks to transcend, and it risks treating as merely contingent the social structures that are in fact fundamental to the reproduction of those conditions.

Abdul Kafi's engagement with this tension in his reading of *Raktakarobi* is, we can assume from his broader intellectual commitments, one of immanent critique rather than simple rejection. He does not, in the manner of a vulgar Marxism, simply dismiss Tagore's universalism as a form of bourgeois idealism that fails to see the class character of the social conflicts it stages. He takes the universalism seriously as an expression of genuine humanist values while also asking what it obscures and what it reveals about the specific social conditions within which the play was produced. The result is a reading that is both more faithful to the play's specific literary character and more politically sophisticated than either a purely appreciative aesthetic reading or a reductive ideological critique.

CHAPTER FOUR: DHUMKETU AND THE REVOLUTIONARY IMAGINATION

Nazrul Islam's Literary Politics and the Bengal Left

4.1 Kazi Nazrul Islam and the Problem of Religious Humanism

The third text at the center of Abdul Kafi's major scholarly work, the journal *Dhumketu*, associated with the poet and revolutionary Kazi Nazrul Islam, raises questions about the

relationship between religious identity and Marxian politics that are especially significant for a Muslim Bengali intellectual like Abdul Kafi himself. Nazrul Islam occupies a unique position in Bengali cultural history: he is simultaneously the national poet of Bangladesh, a figure of enormous significance for Bengali Muslim cultural identity, and a major contributor to the tradition of secular, humanist, revolutionary literary culture that the Bengali Marxian tradition claims as its inheritance.

The apparent paradox of Nazrul's position, straddling as it does the worlds of Islamic devotional culture and secular revolutionary politics, is not actually a paradox but an expression of a specific historical moment in which the boundaries between these worlds were more permeable than they subsequently became. The period of the early 1920s, when *Dhumketu* was published, was a moment of extraordinary political creativity in which different forms of radicalism, including the emerging communist movement, Islamic reformism, Hindu nationalism, and secular Bengali nationalism, were all in active dialogue and contestation with each other. Nazrul's work drew on all of these currents, combining the imagery and emotional power of Islamic devotional poetry with the political urgency of communist and nationalist ideology in ways that were genuinely synthetic rather than merely eclectic.

For Abdul Kafi's analysis, this syncretic quality of Nazrul's work is both an analytical challenge and an intellectual resource. It is a challenge because it resists the kind of categorical analysis that simply assigns a thinker to one tradition or another. It is a resource because it demonstrates the possibility of a form of Marxian cultural politics that is genuinely rooted in the specific religious and cultural traditions of the Bengali Muslim community rather than treating those traditions as obstacles to be overcome.

4.2 The Rhetoric of *Dhumketu*: Analysis of Political Language

The specific literary achievement of *Dhumketu* lies in its development of a new kind of political rhetoric that was simultaneously accessible to a popular Bengali Muslim readership and genuinely radical in its political implications. Nazrul's writing in the journal drew on the tradition of Bengali Islamic devotional poetry, on the tradition of Bengali folk music, on the classical Arabic and Persian literary traditions that were part of the cultural heritage of Bengali Muslims, and on the international communist political vocabulary that was beginning to circulate in Bengali intellectual circles in the early 1920s. The result was a form of writing that was unlike anything that had appeared in Bengali political journalism before: a writing that was simultaneously lyrical and polemical, simultaneously rooted in specific cultural traditions and oriented toward a universalist political vision, simultaneously emotionally powerful and intellectually serious.

The colonial authorities recognized the political danger of this form of writing. *Dhumketu* was repeatedly censored, and several issues of the journal were seized by the colonial police. Nazrul himself was arrested and imprisoned in 1922 for writing a poem, "Anandamoyeer Agomone" (The Advent of Anandamayi), that was deemed to be seditious. His response to his imprisonment, the poem "Rajbandir Jabanbandi" (Testimony of a Political Prisoner), written while in jail, is one of the most powerful statements of the relationship between political commitment and literary vocation in the entire Bengali tradition.

Abdul Kafi's analysis of *Dhumketu* engages with this political rhetoric through a combination of close reading and historical analysis that attempts to understand both the specific literary mechanisms through which the journal achieved its political effects and the historical conditions that made those effects possible. The analysis asks how the specific features of the journal's language, including its use of Islamic imagery, its adaptation of devotional musical forms, and its combination of revolutionary political content with lyrical aesthetic form, contributed to its political effectiveness, and what this tells us about the relationship between cultural form and political function in the specific context of colonial Bengal.

4.3 Nazrul and the Question of Communal Harmony

One of the most politically important dimensions of Nazrul Islam's work, and one that is directly relevant to Abdul Kafi's situation as a Muslim Bengali Marxist intellectual in contemporary India, is Nazrul's lifelong commitment to communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims. In a political context increasingly shaped by the growth of communal conflict, Nazrul insisted on the unity of the Bengali cultural tradition across religious lines, celebrating both Islamic and Hindu cultural forms and insisting that the revolutionary movement needed to transcend communal divisions if it was to achieve its political goals.

This commitment to communal harmony was not merely a political strategy but a philosophical position rooted in Nazrul's specific understanding of the relationship between religion, culture, and human identity. For Nazrul, the Islamic devotional tradition and the Hindu Vaishnavite tradition both expressed dimensions of a common human aspiration toward the divine that transcended their specific institutional forms. The revolutionary humanist politics that he advocated was not a secular rejection of religion but a humanist transformation of religious feeling: a redirection of the emotional and spiritual energies of religious devotion toward the project of human emancipation.

For Abdul Kafi, Nazrul's example provides a model for understanding how a genuinely Marxian commitment to the overcoming of religious divisions can be articulated in a language that takes seriously the specific cultural and emotional significance of religious tradition rather than simply dismissing religion as false consciousness. This model is directly relevant to the specific challenges facing the Bengali Marxian tradition in the current period of Hindu nationalist dominance, when the defense of communal harmony requires not simply the assertion of secular principles but the mobilization of specific cultural resources for the work of communal solidarity.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE PHILOSOPHICAL DEPTH OF THE MARXIAN LITERARY CRITICAL METHOD

Epistemology, Ontology, and the Claims of Criticism

5.1 What Marxian Literary Criticism Claims to Know

Any serious assessment of Abdul Kafi's contribution to Marxian literary criticism must engage with the fundamental epistemological question that underlies the entire project: what does Marxian literary criticism claim to know, and how does it claim to know it? This is not simply a methodological question about the procedures of literary analysis. It is a philosophical question about the relationship between knowledge and reality, between critical theory and literary text, and between the academic practice of interpretation and the political project of social transformation.

The epistemological foundation of Marxian literary criticism, as practiced in the Bengali tradition and as exemplified in Abdul Kafi's work, is a form of what we might call critical realism: the position that literary texts are not simply aesthetic objects whose meaning is constituted by the interpretive communities that read them, but social documents that encode specific forms of knowledge about the social reality within which they were produced, and that the task of criticism is to develop the interpretive frameworks and the analytical procedures necessary to decode that encoded knowledge and make it available for understanding and reflection.

This position stands in explicit contrast to both aesthetic formalism, which treats the literary text as a self-sufficient aesthetic object whose meaning is constituted entirely by its internal formal relations, and to extreme versions of reader-response theory, which locate meaning entirely in the reader's interpretive response rather than in any property of the text itself. The Marxian position is that texts have specific social meanings that are determined by the conditions of their production and reception, and that these meanings are not simply available to naive or unreflective reading but require the development of specifically critical analytical tools to access.

The claim to knowledge that Marxian literary criticism makes is therefore a conditional one: it claims to reveal what is ideologically occluded in literary texts, what social relations are encoded in their formal structures, and what political implications follow from their specific ways of representing social reality. But it claims to reveal these things only through the application of specific theoretical frameworks and interpretive procedures, not through a direct intuitive access to the text's meaning. The theoretical frameworks, including the analysis of base and superstructure, of ideology and false consciousness, of commodity fetishism, of class conflict and political struggle, are the tools through which the hidden social content of literary texts is made visible. Without these tools, the critic who reads even the most politically significant text will miss the dimensions of its meaning that the Marxian analysis reveals.

5.2 The Ontology of the Literary Text in Marxian Theory

The ontological question about the literary text, its mode of being and its relationship to social reality, is one of the most fundamental and most contested questions in the philosophy of literature. For the Marxian tradition, the text is not a free-floating autonomous object but a social product: it is produced in specific material conditions, by specific social agents, for specific social purposes, and its meaning is therefore inseparable from those conditions, agents, and purposes. This does not mean that the text's meaning is simply reducible to its social conditions of production: the relationship between the social conditions of production and the meaning of

the text is always a complex, mediated, and contradictory one that requires careful analysis rather than simple derivation.

Lukacs' concept of the literary work as a representation of the "totality" of social relations was an attempt to describe this ontological relationship in positive terms: the great literary work is one that captures the totality of social relations within the specific particulars of its narrative, achieving a form of social knowledge that is more comprehensive and more vivid than any abstract theoretical analysis could provide. This is a powerful idea, but it raises important questions about what "totality" means and whether any single literary work can genuinely capture it. The Adornian critique of Lukacs' concept of totality, which insists that the very aspiration to represent a unified totality is itself ideological in the conditions of capitalist fragmentation, challenges this positive account and suggests a more negative ontology of the literary text: one in which the text's social significance lies not in its ability to represent the totality but in its ability to register and make visible the specific forms of social contradiction and alienation that make a unified totality impossible.

For Abdul Kafi's practice, both the Lukacsian and the Adornian insights are relevant. His analysis of *Raktakarobi*, for example, might draw on the Lukacsian insight about the text's capacity to represent the totality of the social contradiction between the logic of accumulation and the principle of human wholeness, while also drawing on the Adornian insight about the specific way in which the play's non-naturalistic theatrical form registers the impossibility of resolution, the irresolvability of the contradiction that it stages. The combination of these two analytical approaches, rather than the mechanical application of either one, is what gives the most sophisticated Marxian literary criticism its philosophical depth and its critical power.

5.3 Dialectics as Method in Literary Analysis

The dialectical method, which Marx inherited from Hegel and transformed in the direction of a materialist analysis of social reality, is not simply a theoretical framework to be applied to literary texts. It is a specific mode of thinking that requires a particular form of attention and a particular form of intellectual honesty. The dialectical method insists on holding contradictions in tension rather than resolving them prematurely, on understanding phenomena not in their apparent stability but in their movement and transformation, and on tracing the connections between apparently separate dimensions of social reality rather than analyzing them in isolation.

Applied to literary analysis, the dialectical method produces a form of reading that is simultaneously attentive to the specific particularity of the text and to its connections with the broader social totality, simultaneously sensitive to the formal dimensions of the literary work and to the ideological content that those formal dimensions express, and simultaneously respectful of the literary achievement and critical of its limitations and contradictions. This is a demanding form of reading that requires both literary sensitivity and theoretical rigor, and it is the form of reading that the Bengali Marxian tradition at its best has always attempted to practice.

For Abdul Kafi's specific analyses, the dialectical method means, among other things, refusing the false choice between appreciating Tagore's literary achievement and critiquing its ideological limitations, between celebrating Nazrul's revolutionary humanism and examining its

contradictions, and between honoring the tradition of Bengali leftist literary culture and subjecting it to the critical analysis that genuine intellectual honesty requires. The dialectical reading holds all of these tensions in productive suspension, using the tension itself as a source of intellectual illumination rather than resolving it through a premature simplification.

CHAPTER SIX: THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF LITERARY PRODUCTION

Political Economy, the Publishing Industry, and the Market for Ideas

6.1 The Political Economy of Bengali Publishing

Any adequate Marxian analysis of Bengali literary culture must attend to the political economy of the publishing industry within which that culture is produced and circulated. The materialist insistence that ideas do not develop in a vacuum but are produced within specific economic conditions and shaped by specific market forces is directly applicable to the literary sphere, and it requires the analysis of the specific economic structures that determine what gets published, who reads it, and what forms of writing are rewarded and what are marginalized.

The National Book Agency (NBA), with which Abdul Kafi has published, occupies a specific and significant position in the political economy of Bengali publishing. Founded in 1943 as a publishing house with explicit connections to the communist and progressive cultural movement in Bengal, the NBA has throughout its history served as the primary institutional vehicle for the publication and distribution of left-wing Bengali literature, criticism, and political analysis. Its role in the Bengali publishing landscape is not simply that of a commercial publisher that happens to specialize in left-wing material. It is an institution with a specific political and cultural mission: to make Marxian and progressive ideas available to Bengali readers, to support the work of left-wing writers and scholars, and to maintain the institutional infrastructure of the Bengali left cultural movement.

The fact that Abdul Kafi has published with the NBA is therefore not simply a biographical detail. It is an institutional statement about his relationship to the Bengali left cultural tradition and about the specific community of readers for whom his work is intended. Publishing with the NBA is a choice to address the existing community of Bengali left intellectuals and readers rather than to seek a broader commercial market, and it reflects the same commitment to vernacular intellectual practice that we have discussed in relation to the language question throughout this textbook.

6.2 The Crisis of Progressive Publishing in the Neoliberal Era

The progressive publishing industry in India, including the NBA, has faced significant challenges in the neoliberal era as the commercial publishing market has been transformed by the forces of globalization, digital disruption, and the increasing dominance of large commercial publishers with access to international distribution networks. The specific challenges facing a

publisher like the NBA include the competition from commercial publishers who can offer larger advances and wider distribution networks, the declining state subsidies that historically supported progressive cultural institutions, the competition from digital content that has disrupted the economics of print publishing more generally, and the narrowing of the market for serious political and literary content as popular entertainment increasingly dominates cultural consumption.

These challenges are not simply economic. They have direct implications for the kind of intellectual work that the progressive publishing tradition has historically supported. If progressive publishers can no longer afford to publish serious, long-form scholarly work in Bengali, the institutional infrastructure for the kind of scholarly contribution that Abdul Kafi represents is threatened in ways that no amount of individual intellectual commitment can compensate for. The crisis of progressive publishing is therefore part of the broader crisis of the conditions of intellectual production that we have been analyzing throughout Part Nine and Part Ten.

The Marxian analysis of this crisis requires going beyond the observation that market forces are undermining progressive publishing to ask what structural features of the capitalist cultural market produce this outcome and what kinds of intervention, both within and against the market, are available for addressing it. The range of possible responses includes state subsidy of progressive cultural institutions, the development of cooperative and non-commercial publishing models, the use of open-access digital publishing to reduce the costs of distribution, and the building of international solidarity networks that can provide alternative distribution channels for vernacular progressive publishing. Each of these responses has its own specific possibilities and limitations, and the assessment of their adequacy requires both economic analysis and political judgment.

6.3 Copyright, Intellectual Property, and the Commons of Bengali Literature

The question of copyright and intellectual property has specific significance for the Bengali literary tradition and for the work of scholars like Abdul Kafi who engage with that tradition. The texts that are central to Abdul Kafi's scholarship, including the works of Tagore and Nazrul Islam, are in different stages of their copyright status: Tagore's works, which have been in the public domain since 1961, are freely available for reproduction and analysis, while Nazrul's works, which entered the public domain more recently, were the subject of a significant legal dispute between the Government of Bangladesh and the West Bengal government over the rights to control and commercialize his literary estate.

The politics of copyright in the context of a literary tradition that is shared between two nation-states, India and Bangladesh, separated by the partition of Bengal, raises complex questions about the relationship between cultural heritage, national sovereignty, and the commons of literary culture. The Bangladeshi and Indian claims to Nazrul's literary estate both have legitimate foundations: Nazrul was born in what is now West Bengal, but his work is of enormous cultural significance in Bangladesh, where he is recognized as the national poet. The legal dispute over his copyright, while eventually resolved, illustrates the ways in which the legal

frameworks of intellectual property can become sites of political contestation that are about much more than the economic returns from literary publication.

For a Marxian analysis, the intellectual property system is itself a form of enclosure: the conversion of a cultural commons into a form of private property that can be owned, controlled, and exploited for economic gain. The argument for treating literary and cultural works as public goods, available to all without restriction, is a Marxian argument against the commodification of cultural production that is directly relevant to the conditions within which Bengali literary scholarship operates. The digitalization of Bengali literary texts, the development of open-access archives of Bengali literature, and the resistance to the privatization of the Bengali cultural heritage through expansive intellectual property claims: all of these are specific practices that express a Marxian commitment to maintaining the commons of Bengali cultural life against the enclosure of the market.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE LEGAL AND JURISPRUDENTIAL DIMENSIONS OF THE TRADITION

Rights, Responsibilities, and the Scholar in Society

7.1 The Intellectual as Citizen: Rights and Duties

The question of the relationship between intellectual life and civic responsibility is one that has been debated throughout the history of political philosophy, and it takes a specific form in the context of the Bengali Marxian tradition and Abdul Kafi's specific situation. The Marxian tradition has always insisted on the inseparability of intellectual work and political commitment: the intellectual who retreats into the safety of pure scholarship, refusing to engage with the political implications of their work and the political challenges of their time, is, in the Marxian analysis, not simply making a personal choice but performing an ideological function. The claim to political neutrality is itself a political position, one that serves the interests of those who benefit from the existing order.

For Abdul Kafi, as for all intellectuals working in the Marxian tradition, the commitment to political engagement is not merely an optional supplement to the scholarly work but an integral dimension of what it means to practice the tradition seriously. But political engagement, in the specific context of contemporary India, carries specific legal risks that must be understood and navigated. The legal framework within which political expression operates has been significantly transformed by the BJP government's use of legal instruments to silence and intimidate critics, and this transformation has direct implications for the practice of committed scholarship.

The jurisprudential question here is not simply about the rights of the individual intellectual but about the structure of rights in a democratic society and the conditions under which those rights are genuinely exercised rather than formally proclaimed but practically negated. The right to freedom of expression, guaranteed by Article 19 of the Indian Constitution, is meaningless if those who exercise it face systematic legal harassment, physical intimidation, and institutional

retaliation. The legal protection of rights requires not only the formal guarantee of rights by the Constitution but the existence of an independent judiciary willing to enforce those rights against state power, a free press capable of publicizing violations, and a civil society strong enough to mobilize in defense of rights when they are threatened.

All three of these conditions are under pressure in the current Indian political context, and the assessment of the legal protection of academic freedom in India requires honest acknowledgment of this fact. The increasing subordination of the judiciary to executive influence, the growth of self-censorship in the media, and the weakening of civil society organizations through legal harassment and funding restrictions: all of these developments create conditions in which the formal rights of scholars like Abdul Kafi are real on paper but increasingly precarious in practice.

7.2 Constitutional Interpretation and the Claims of Dissent

The relationship between constitutional interpretation and the protection of academic dissent is a central question in the jurisprudence of free expression that has specific relevance to the situation of Marxian scholars in contemporary India. The Indian Supreme Court's interpretation of Article 19(1)(a) has generally been expansive, recognizing that the right to freedom of expression includes the right to dissent from official positions and to advocate for radical political change, provided that the advocacy does not amount to incitement to imminent lawless action. This is a broadly liberal interpretation that is in principle protective of the kind of political expression that the Bengali Marxian tradition engages in.

But the practical protection of this right has been undermined by the expansive interpretation of sedition law and the UAPA that the government and the courts have permitted. The concept of "sedition" as defined in Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, which was introduced by the British colonial administration and has been retained in the Indian legal system, criminalizes any expression that "brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt" the government. This is an extraordinarily broad provision that can potentially criminalize virtually any serious political criticism, and its application by the current government against scholars, journalists, and activists who have criticized its policies has had a significant chilling effect on free expression.

The jurisprudential question of how to interpret sedition law in a manner consistent with the constitutional guarantee of free expression has been before the Indian courts repeatedly, and the courts' responses have been inconsistent and sometimes politically shaped. The Supreme Court's decision in *Kedar Nath Singh versus State of Bihar* in 1962, which upheld the constitutionality of sedition law while limiting its application to expressions that incite violence or public disorder, theoretically provides protection for political criticism that does not cross this line. But the practical application of this limit by lower courts and by police has been far less consistent, and the use of sedition charges as a tool of political harassment has continued regardless of the theoretical limits imposed by the Supreme Court.

7.3 International Human Rights Law and Academic Freedom

The question of academic freedom is not only a matter of domestic constitutional law: it is also a matter of international human rights law, and the growing body of international standards for the protection of academic freedom provides an important external framework for evaluating the treatment of scholars like Abdul Kafi in the current Indian political context.

The right to academic freedom is recognized in a number of international human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which India has ratified, and in UNESCO's 1997 Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel, which provides detailed standards for the protection of academic freedom. The UNESCO Recommendation specifically states that higher-education teaching personnel are entitled to "freedom of teaching, research, and scholarship," including the freedom to "investigate, discover, and convey their scholarly views in the spirit of academic freedom," without "any other institutional censorship."

These international standards do not have the same legal force in India as domestic law, but they provide an important normative framework against which the treatment of academic freedom in India can be assessed. The increasing gap between these international standards and the practical reality of academic freedom in contemporary India is itself a significant political and human rights concern that the international scholarly community has a responsibility to document and to address.

CHAPTER EIGHT: PSYCHOLOGY OF THE INTELLECTUAL AND THE TRADITION OF SELF-UNDERSTANDING

Inner Life, Outer Pressure, and the Question of Integrity

8.1 The Relationship Between Personal Identity and Intellectual Work

The question of the relationship between personal identity and intellectual work is one that all serious scholars must eventually confront, and it takes a particularly charged form in the case of an intellectual like Abdul Kafi whose personal identity, as a Muslim, Bengali, Marxist scholar, places him at the intersection of several forms of social marking that are under specific political pressure in the current Indian conjuncture. How does one's personal identity shape one's intellectual work? And how does one's intellectual work, in turn, shape one's understanding of one's personal identity?

These questions have a long history in the philosophy of mind and in the sociology of knowledge. The Marxian tradition has generally been suspicious of too strong a claim about the influence of personal identity on intellectual work, insisting that the criteria for evaluating intellectual claims are objective rather than personal: what matters is not who says something but whether it is true. This insistence on the objectivity of intellectual standards is an important corrective to forms of identity politics that reduce intellectual work to the expression of personal or group identity. But it does not fully capture the ways in which personal experience and social position shape the questions one asks, the methods one uses, and the insights one achieves.

The concept of "standpoint epistemology," developed within feminist philosophy and subsequently taken up in other critical traditions, provides a more nuanced framework for understanding this relationship. Standpoint epistemology argues that the social position of the knower, including their gender, class, race, and other social identities, shapes what they can see and what they cannot see in the social world. Those who occupy marginalized positions in the social order may have access to forms of knowledge about the workings of that order that those who occupy privileged positions cannot easily achieve, precisely because the experience of marginalization illuminates dimensions of the social structure that privilege tends to naturalize and render invisible.

Applied to Abdul Kafi's situation, standpoint epistemology suggests that his position as a Muslim Bengali Marxist intellectual at a public university may give him access to specific forms of insight about the politics of knowledge, the operations of institutional power, and the relationship between religious identity and intellectual life that scholars who do not occupy this specific social position cannot easily achieve. This is not a claim that his perspective is superior or more objective than others: it is a claim that it is specific, that it sees from a particular location, and that this location enables certain forms of insight while limiting others.

8.2 Intellectual Integrity and the Temptation of Accommodation

One of the most important questions in the psychology of the intellectual is the question of integrity: the capacity to maintain intellectual honesty and political commitment in the face of pressures to accommodate, to moderate, to self-censor, and to conform to the expectations of those who hold institutional power. This is a question that is particularly pressing in the current Indian political context, where the pressures on dissenting intellectuals are real and sometimes severe.

The temptation of accommodation takes many forms. The most obvious is the direct pressure of political intimidation: the fear of the legal, physical, or professional consequences of speaking and writing in ways that challenge the dominant political order. But there are subtler forms of accommodation that are in some ways more insidious precisely because they are less visible: the tendency to choose research topics that are unlikely to attract political attention, the tendency to phrase arguments in ways that are less politically direct than the evidence warrants, the tendency to participate in the forms of self-promotion that the metric-based academic evaluation system rewards at the expense of the more politically committed forms of work that the tradition values.

The resistance to these forms of accommodation is itself a form of intellectual practice that requires specific psychological resources: the ability to maintain a clear sense of what one values and why, the capacity to distinguish between legitimate scholarly caution and ideologically motivated self-censorship, and the courage to accept the professional and personal costs of intellectual honesty when those costs are real. These are not simply personal virtues: they are social practices that are sustained or undermined by the institutional environments and the intellectual communities within which one works. The strength of the Jadavpur tradition of academic freedom, the solidarity of the teachers' association, and the culture of mutual protection and support that the Centre for Marxian Studies has developed: all of these institutional and cultural resources contribute to the maintenance of intellectual integrity under pressure.

8.3 The Long Game of Intellectual Commitment

The concept of intellectual commitment as a "long game" is one that the Marxian tradition has always understood, even when individual practitioners of the tradition have been impatient for immediate results. The transformation of social consciousness, the building of counter-hegemonic cultural institutions, the development of genuinely critical intellectual frameworks: all of these are processes that unfold over decades and generations rather than over months or years. The scholar who commits to these processes must be prepared for the experience of working in conditions where the immediate results of their work are not visible, where the political forces they oppose appear to be winning, and where the institutional conditions of their work are deteriorating rather than improving.

This is the experience that many scholars of Abdul Kafi's generation, working in the Bengali Marxian tradition in the current period, are living. The political forces that the tradition opposes are in the ascendant. The institutional conditions of academic work are under severe pressure. The public culture is increasingly hostile to the kind of serious, politically committed intellectual work that the tradition represents. Under these conditions, the maintenance of intellectual commitment requires a specific form of historical perspective: the ability to see the current moment not as the final verdict on the tradition's project but as one phase in a long historical process that has known many reverses and many periods of apparent defeat.

Gramsci himself is the most powerful example of this kind of long-game intellectual commitment within the Marxian tradition. Writing in Mussolini's prison, cut off from political activity, denied access to books and research materials, facing the prospect of spending the rest of his life incarcerated, Gramsci continued to develop some of the most important Marxian theoretical insights of the twentieth century. His Prison Notebooks are a monument not only to intellectual brilliance but to the specific form of intellectual courage that consists in the refusal to let external adversity determine the quality and the seriousness of one's thinking.

For Abdul Kafi, facing conditions that are difficult but incomparably less severe than Gramsci's, the Gramscian example is both an inspiration and a challenge: an inspiration because it demonstrates that serious intellectual work is possible even in the most adverse conditions, and a challenge because it sets an extraordinarily high standard for the quality of thinking that adverse conditions can produce.

CHAPTER NINE: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS

The Bengali Marxian Tradition in World Intellectual History

9.1 The Place of the Bengali Marxian Tradition in Global Marxism

The assessment of Abdul Kafi's contribution to intellectual life requires situating his work not only within the Bengali literary tradition and the Indian academic landscape but within the broader history of global Marxian thought. The question of what the Bengali Marxian tradition

contributes to global Marxism, and what global Marxism contributes to the Bengali tradition, is one that has been implicit throughout this textbook and that requires explicit address in the concluding assessment.

The Bengali Marxian tradition has made several distinctive contributions to the global conversation within Marxian scholarship. First, it has developed a specifically vernacular form of Marxian cultural analysis: a form of Marxian literary criticism that operates in the Bengali language, addresses a Bengali readership, and takes the specific features of Bengali literary culture as its primary object of analysis rather than treating Bengali literature as merely an instance of universal patterns derived from European literary history. This vernacular Marxian criticism is a genuinely distinctive contribution that is not simply a local variant of European Marxism but a specific intellectual achievement that has its own methods, its own canonical texts, and its own forms of theoretical insight.

Second, the Bengali Marxian tradition has developed a specifically postcolonial form of Marxian analysis: a form that takes seriously the specific historical experience of colonialism and its aftermath as a constitutive dimension of the social reality that Marxian analysis must address, rather than treating colonialism as a peripheral variant of the primary narrative of capitalist development in Europe. The contributions of Bengali and Indian scholars to the development of subaltern studies, to the analysis of colonial political economy, and to the theorization of postcolonial cultural politics have been recognized internationally as major contributions to Marxian scholarship, and they have their roots in the specific intellectual tradition of which Abdul Kafi's work is a part.

Third, the Bengali Marxian tradition has maintained a distinctive form of engagement with the question of culture and consciousness that is in some respects more sophisticated than the base-superstructure reductionism that has often characterized Western Marxian literary criticism. The Bengali tradition's engagement with the richness of Bengali literary and cultural life has made it resistant to the tendency to treat culture as simply an effect of economic base, and has produced forms of analysis that attend to the specific ways in which literary and cultural forms are themselves sites of political struggle and not merely reflections of economic relations.

9.2 The Bengali Contribution to Third World Marxism

The specific contribution of the Bengali Marxian tradition to what has been called "Third World Marxism" or the Marxism of the global South deserves extended consideration, because it is in this context that the tradition's most distinctive and most important contributions are most clearly visible.

Third World Marxism, as a distinct intellectual current, emerged in the mid-twentieth century as Marxian scholars, activists, and political leaders in Asia, Africa, and Latin America engaged with the specific conditions of their own societies and found the classical Marxian framework, derived from the analysis of European capitalism, inadequate for addressing those conditions without significant modification. The contributions of figures like Mao Zedong in China, Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, Frantz Fanon in Algeria, Jose Carlos Mariategui in Peru, and Amílcar Cabral in Guinea-Bissau to the development of specifically Third World forms of Marxian political

theory are well recognized. Less well recognized, but equally significant, are the contributions of Indian and Bengali Marxian thinkers to this broader intellectual movement.

The Bengali contribution to Third World Marxism centers on several specific theoretical innovations. The analysis of colonial political economy, developed by scholars like Romesh Chunder Dutt and later by Bipan Chandra, Irfan Habib, and the Subaltern Studies historians, has provided the most rigorous empirical foundation for the Marxian analysis of imperialism's effects on Third World societies. The development of specifically Indian forms of Marxian cultural analysis, in which the analysis of literary and cultural texts is inseparable from the analysis of colonial history and postcolonial politics, has produced a form of cultural Marxism that is genuinely responsive to the specific conditions of the Indian social formation rather than being derived from European models. And the engagement of Bengali Marxian scholars with the specific traditions of Bengali literature and philosophy has produced a form of cultural criticism that demonstrates the possibility of conducting Marxian analysis within the resources of a non-European intellectual tradition rather than simply importing European categories and applying them to non-European materials.

9.3 The Question of Eurocentrism and the Bengali Response

The critique of Eurocentrism in the Marxian tradition, associated with scholars like Samir Amin, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Vivek Dhareshwar, raises a fundamental question about the relationship between the universal claims of Marxian theory and the specific historical experience of European capitalism from which those claims were derived. If Marxian theory is derived from the analysis of a specifically European form of capitalism, how adequate is it for the analysis of social formations shaped by different historical experiences, different cultural traditions, and different relationships to the world system?

This is a question that the Bengali Marxian tradition has engaged with in sophisticated and productive ways, even when it has not always named the engagement explicitly as a response to Eurocentrism. The practice of conducting Marxian analysis in Bengali, using Bengali literary texts as the primary objects of analysis and addressing a Bengali readership, is itself a form of resistance to the Eurocentrism implicit in the demand that serious Marxian scholarship be conducted in European languages, with European texts, for European audiences. The development of specifically Bengali forms of Marxian cultural analysis, responsive to the specific features of Bengali literary and cultural history, is an intellectual practice that challenges the assumption that the categories and methods of Marxian theory are simply universal tools that can be applied anywhere without modification.

The most important Bengali contribution to the critique of Eurocentrism in Marxian theory is perhaps the insistence, implicit in the tradition's practice if not always explicit in its theoretical formulation, that the historical experience of colonialism is not peripheral to the development of global capitalism but constitutive of it. The drain of wealth from India to Britain, the destruction of Indian industries to create markets for British manufactures, the use of Indian land and labor for the production of commodities for the British market: all of these are not side-effects of British capitalism but central mechanisms through which British capitalism developed and maintained its global dominance. This insistence requires a revision of the Marxian narrative of

capitalist development that takes seriously the constitutive role of colonialism and imperialism rather than treating them as external additions to a primarily European story.

CHAPTER TEN: THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF SCHOLARLY COMMUNITIES

Power, Institution, and the Social Character of Intellectual Production

10.1 Pierre Bourdieu and the Academic Field

Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of intellectual life, developed most fully in his works on the academic field and the production of scholarly knowledge, provides one of the most powerful frameworks available for analyzing the social conditions within which scholars like Abdul Kafi work and the specific forms of power that shape the production of knowledge in academic institutions.

Bourdieu's central concept for analyzing the academic world is that of the "field": a relatively autonomous social space organized around specific forms of capital, specific rules of the game, and specific forms of competition and cooperation. The academic field is structured by what Bourdieu calls "academic capital": the specific form of symbolic power that accrues to those who have mastered the rules of the academic game and who have accumulated the credentials, publications, citations, and institutional positions that constitute capital within the academic field. The distribution of academic capital within the field determines what counts as legitimate scholarship, what forms of intellectual work are rewarded and what are marginalized, and who has the authority to speak and whose voice is heard.

Applied to Abdul Kafi's situation, Bourdieu's framework illuminates the specific ways in which the structure of the academic field shapes and constrains his intellectual work. Within the Bengali academic field, his position as the Coordinator of the Centre for Marxian Studies at Jadavpur University, one of the most prestigious institutions in the Indian academic landscape, gives him a form of academic capital that provides real authority and real institutional resources for his intellectual work. But within the global academic field, structured by the dominance of English-language publications and Euro-American institutional standards, his vernacular scholarship and his institutional position in a South Asian university give him much less capital, and his work is therefore less visible and less recognized internationally than it might deserve.

10.2 Knowledge Production and the Politics of Citation

The politics of citation in the academic world is one of the clearest expressions of the power relations that structure the production and recognition of knowledge. The citation system, which is supposed to be a neutral mechanism for acknowledging intellectual debts and for tracing the development of ideas, is in fact a system of symbolic recognition that is deeply shaped by the power relations of the academic field. Who gets cited, how often, in what contexts, and by whom: all of these determinations are not simply the result of the objective importance of the

cited work but are shaped by the structural positions of the citer and the cited within the academic field, by the linguistic accessibility of the cited work, by the institutional prestige of the publication in which it appears, and by the networks of personal and professional relationship that connect different scholarly communities.

For scholars working in non-dominant languages and at non-dominant institutions, the citation system is structurally unfavorable in ways that reproduce the existing inequalities of the academic field rather than measuring the actual quality or importance of scholarly contributions. A Marxian literary critic who writes in Bengali and publishes with an Indian progressive publisher will receive far fewer international citations than a scholar of comparable ability and insight who writes in English and publishes with a prestigious American or British academic press. This is not because the Bengali-language scholar's work is less important or less original. It is because the citation system measures visibility and accessibility within the English-language international academic mainstream rather than the intrinsic quality or importance of intellectual contributions.

10.3 Intellectual Solidarities and the Counter-Hegemonic Network

The concept of a "counter-hegemonic network" is useful for describing the specific institutional arrangements through which the Bengali Marxian tradition maintains its intellectual vitality and its political commitments in the face of the dominant power structures of the academic world. The network of scholars who have participated in the Centre for Marxian Studies at Jadavpur, the publication relationships that connect Bengali Marxian scholars to each other and to international Marxian scholarship, the personal and intellectual relationships between Bengali scholars and the international left academic community: all of these constitute a form of intellectual solidarity that provides resources and support for work that the dominant academic institutions do not reward.

The concept of intellectual solidarity is not simply a warm feeling of communal belonging. It is a specific form of collective practice through which scholars protect, support, and develop each other's work in ways that the market-driven logic of the academic field does not encourage. It includes the peer review relationships through which scholars assess and improve each other's work, the public advocacy through which scholars defend each other against institutional and political threats, the collaborative intellectual projects through which scholars develop ideas together that none of them could develop alone, and the informal mentoring relationships through which senior scholars support and guide the development of junior scholars.

For Abdul Kafi, the Centre for Marxian Studies has been the primary institutional vehicle for the cultivation and maintenance of this kind of intellectual solidarity. The Centre's seminars, its visiting scholars program, and its publication activities have all contributed to building and sustaining a network of Marxian scholars in Bengal and across India that provides a genuine intellectual community for its members. This community is one of the most important resources that the Bengali Marxian tradition has for sustaining its intellectual vitality in the face of the pressures we have discussed throughout this textbook.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: FINAL ASSESSMENT AND INTELLECTUAL LEGACY

What Endures and Why It Matters

11.1 The Enduring Contributions: A Synthesis

We are now in a position to attempt the synthesis toward which the entire textbook has been building: a comprehensive assessment of what Abdul Kafi's intellectual contribution to Bengali literary scholarship, to Marxian critical theory, and to the broader intellectual life of the global South amounts to, and what it means for the questions that matter most.

The first and most fundamental contribution is the demonstration, through sustained and serious scholarly practice, that the Bengali Marxian literary tradition is a genuine and living intellectual tradition capable of producing work of genuine insight and political significance. This may seem like a modest claim, but it is in fact an important one. The dominant forces of the contemporary academic world, including the metric-based evaluation systems of neoliberal academic governance and the linguistic hierarchies of the international academic mainstream, work systematically to render vernacular, politically committed, non-English-language scholarship invisible and marginal. The practice of serious Marxian literary criticism in Bengali, at the highest intellectual standards the tradition commands, is itself a refutation of the assumptions that support this marginalization.

The second contribution is the specific textual analyses that Abdul Kafi's scholarship has produced: analyses of Langol, Raktakarobi, and Dhumketu that illuminate these specific texts in ways that neither purely aesthetic nor purely political readings can achieve, and that demonstrate the continuing power of the Marxian critical framework, properly applied, to produce genuine intellectual insight about the relationship between literary form and social content, between cultural production and historical conditions.

The third contribution is the institutional work of maintaining and developing the Centre for Marxian Studies at Jadavpur University: work that has created and sustained an intellectual space for interdisciplinary Marxian scholarship in India that is unusual in the contemporary academic landscape and that has produced genuine intellectual benefits for the community of scholars and students who have participated in it.

The fourth contribution is the pedagogical work of teaching generations of Bengali students to read literature critically, to think historically, and to engage seriously with the political implications of cultural production. This contribution is the least visible and the least easily documented, but it may be the most significant in terms of its long-term impact on the tradition's development.

11.2 The Limitations: An Honest Assessment

An honest assessment must also identify the limitations of Abdul Kafi's contribution, not to diminish it but to understand it fully and to identify the directions in which the tradition needs to develop further.

The most significant limitation, which we have identified in the course of the textbook, is the inadequate engagement with the challenge of caste and the Ambedkarite critique of the Brahminical intellectual tradition. If the Bengali Marxian tradition, including Abdul Kafi's work within it, has not yet fully incorporated the insights of anti-caste thought and standpoint epistemology into its theoretical framework and its institutional practice, this is a genuine intellectual limitation that affects the tradition's adequacy as an analysis of Bengali and Indian social reality.

A second limitation is the relatively limited engagement with feminist theory and with the specific experiences and perspectives of Bengali women as producers and consumers of literary culture. While the Bengali literary tradition itself includes major women writers whose work deserves sustained Marxian analysis, the critical tradition has not always given adequate attention to the gender dimensions of the social reality it analyzes or to the specific contributions of women writers to the tradition's development.

A third limitation is the relatively limited engagement with the ecology question and with the specific forms of ecological crisis that are most urgently relevant to the Bengali context. The metabolic rift that capitalism has produced in the Bengal delta, the specific ecological dimensions of the Bengali social crisis, and the resources that the Bengali literary tradition offers for an ecological imagination: all of these deserve more sustained and systematic attention than the tradition has yet given them.

These are not criticisms that are unique to Abdul Kafi's work: they are limitations of the tradition as a whole that individual scholars have addressed to varying degrees. They represent the intellectual agenda for the next phase of the tradition's development, and identifying them honestly is itself a contribution to the tradition's self-understanding and self-renewal.

11.3 What the Tradition Has Always Known and What It Needs to Learn

The Bengali Marxian literary tradition, at its best, has always known several things of permanent intellectual significance that no amount of historical change or political reversal can make obsolete.

It has known that literature is not merely an aesthetic object but a social document that encodes the specific forms of consciousness, ideology, and aspiration of the society that produced it, and that the analysis of literature is therefore inseparable from the analysis of the social conditions of its production.

It has known that the analysis of culture cannot be separated from the analysis of political economy: that the way people imagine the world they live in is inseparable from the material conditions of that world, and that any cultural criticism that abstracts from those material conditions is not simply incomplete but ideologically distorted.

It has known that intellectual work has political implications and political responsibilities, and that the scholar who refuses to acknowledge and engage with those implications is not achieving a position of neutral objectivity but performing a specific ideological function.

It has known that the languages and literatures of non-European peoples have their own specific intellectual significance and their own specific contributions to the universal conversation about human experience and human emancipation, and that the subordination of those languages and literatures to the standards and judgments of European culture is itself a form of ideological domination that serious scholarship must challenge.

And what the tradition needs to learn, in the light of the challenges and developments we have discussed throughout this textbook, includes a more fully intersectional understanding of social oppression that takes seriously the specific dimensions of caste, gender, and ecology alongside class; a more genuinely dialogical relationship with the intellectual traditions of the communities most directly affected by the conditions it analyzes; and a more systematic engagement with the specific forms of crisis, both ecological and political, that define the urgency of the present moment.

11.4 The Living Tradition and the Task Ahead

A living intellectual tradition is not simply the sum of its past achievements. It is an ongoing project of understanding that takes new forms in response to new conditions, that develops new methods and new concepts in dialogue with new challenges, and that is renewed from within by each new generation of scholars and students who encounter it and make it their own.

The Bengali Marxian literary tradition that Abdul Kafi represents is, in this sense, still alive. It continues to produce scholarship, to train students, to engage with the urgent questions of the present, and to insist on the political significance of cultural analysis in a world that needs, as urgently as it has ever needed, both the clarity of Marxian analysis and the depth of humanistic understanding.

The task ahead for those who will carry this tradition forward is not simply the transmission of what has been achieved but the active development of what is still needed: the expansion of the framework to include the dimensions of social reality that the tradition has not yet fully addressed, the deepening of the engagement with the specific literary and cultural resources of the Bengali tradition, and the building of the institutional and political conditions that make serious intellectual work of this kind possible.

This is a daunting task. But the tradition has always faced daunting tasks, and it has always found the intellectual and political resources to address them. The assessment of Abdul Kafi's contribution to the tradition is, in the end, an assessment not of a completed achievement but of a living practice: a practice that is imperfect, that faces real limitations and real challenges, but that embodies genuine intellectual values and genuine political commitments that remain as important today as they have ever been.

CHAPTER TWELVE: THE FUTURE SCHOLAR AND THE TRADITION RENEWED

Advice, Method, and the Continuation of Inquiry

12.1 To the Student of the Tradition

Part Ten would be incomplete without addressing directly the student who comes to this textbook not simply as a reader of intellectual history but as someone who wishes to participate in the tradition they are studying: to develop their own scholarly work within the framework that this textbook has described and analyzed. The following reflections are addressed specifically to that student.

The first piece of advice is the most fundamental: read the texts. Not the secondary literature about the texts, though that is important. Not the theoretical frameworks applied to the texts, though those are also important. The texts themselves: Bengali literary texts, in Bengali, with the depth of attention and the quality of care that serious literary reading demands. If you do not read Bengali, learn it. This is not optional. The tradition we have been discussing is a tradition rooted in a specific language, and no adequate engagement with that tradition is possible through translation alone. Translation can provide access to the broad outlines of an argument or the general shape of a literary work. But the specific features of language, the specific weight of words, the specific quality of a literary voice: these are accessible only through the original.

The second piece of advice is to read widely in the theoretical traditions that the Bengali Marxian tradition draws on and engages with: Marx himself, Gramsci, Lukacs, Brecht, Benjamin, Adorno, Williams, Spivak, Fanon, Ambedkar, and the many other theorists who have been discussed in the course of this textbook. But read them critically, not as authorities whose pronouncements are to be accepted without question, but as thinkers whose arguments are to be engaged, tested, and developed in the light of the specific questions raised by Bengali literary culture and the specific conditions of the contemporary world.

The third piece of advice is to engage honestly with the limitations and contradictions of the tradition you are working within. No intellectual tradition is without flaws, and the Bengali Marxian tradition is no exception. Its inadequate engagement with caste, its incomplete incorporation of feminist insights, its sometimes uncritical relationship with the political forms that the left movement has taken in Bengal: all of these are dimensions of the tradition's practice that a serious student must engage with honestly rather than defending loyally. The tradition's capacity for self-criticism and self-renewal is one of its most important resources, and cultivating that capacity is an important part of what it means to work within the tradition seriously.

The fourth piece of advice is to take the institutional dimensions of intellectual life seriously. Intellectual work does not happen in a vacuum. It happens in specific institutions, under specific material conditions, within specific political contexts that shape what is possible and what is difficult. Understanding those institutional conditions, working to improve them, and building the kinds of institutional solidarities that sustain serious intellectual work over the long term: all of these are dimensions of intellectual practice that the next generation of scholars needs to take as seriously as the purely cognitive dimensions of scholarly work.

12.2 A Methodological Toolkit for Bengali Marxian Literary Analysis

By way of a practical summary, we offer here a methodological toolkit for the practice of Bengali Marxian literary analysis, drawing on the methods and frameworks that have been discussed throughout this textbook and synthesizing them into a practical guide for the scholar who wishes to work within the tradition.

Close reading remains the foundation of the method. Whatever theoretical frameworks are applied to a text, the analysis must begin with a sustained and careful engagement with the text itself, attending to its specific features of language, form, imagery, and structure before moving to broader theoretical and historical analysis. The theoretical frameworks are tools for understanding the text more deeply, not substitutes for engaging with it directly.

Historical contextualization is the second essential element. Every literary text is produced in specific historical conditions that shape its meaning and its significance, and the analysis of those conditions, including the political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions of the historical moment, is an essential part of the Marxian literary critical method. This does not mean reducing the text to its historical context: it means understanding the text in relation to that context, seeing how the text both reflects and responds to the conditions of its production.

Ideological analysis, in the Althusserian sense of identifying the specific ideological frameworks and assumptions that are embedded in the text's representation of social reality, is the third essential element. This analysis must be conducted with care and with attention to the specific ways in which ideology operates through literary form rather than simply through explicit content. The ideology of a text is often most powerfully present not in what it says directly but in what it assumes without argument, in what it represents as natural and inevitable, and in the specific forms of social reality that its narrative or dramatic structure makes visible or invisible.

Comparative analysis, situating the specific text being analyzed in relation to other texts in the Bengali tradition and in relation to the broader traditions of Marxian literature from other national and cultural contexts, is the fourth essential element. Comparison, as we have emphasized throughout this textbook, is not a method for reducing different traditions to a common formula but a method for illuminating specific features of the tradition being analyzed by contrast and analogy with other traditions.

Self-reflective awareness of the scholar's own position within the academic field and the political conjuncture is the fifth essential element. The Marxian tradition's insistence that knowledge is always socially situated applies to the knowledge produced by Marxian scholars as well as to the knowledge produced by those they critique. A genuinely critical Marxian scholarship must therefore include a critical awareness of its own conditions of production and the specific forms of limitation and distortion to which those conditions give rise.

12.3 The Tradition as a Living Practice

We conclude Part Ten and this entire textbook with a reflection on what it means to treat a tradition as a living practice rather than as an archive of past achievements.

A tradition is a living practice when its practitioners take it seriously enough to challenge it, to develop it, and to hold it accountable to the standards it claims to embody. A tradition that is treated simply as an archive, as a set of achievements to be preserved and transmitted without critical engagement, is a tradition in decline: it reproduces the forms of its past without the substance that gave those forms their significance. A tradition that is treated as a living practice, by contrast, is one in which each new generation of practitioners encounters the inheritance of the past with genuine intellectual engagement, takes what is valuable and useful from it, challenges what is limited or mistaken, and develops it in new directions responsive to the new conditions and new questions of the present.

The Bengali Marxian literary tradition that Abdul Kafi represents has been, at its best, a living practice in this sense. It has not simply preserved the Marxian framework inherited from European scholarship: it has developed specifically Bengali forms of Marxian analysis responsive to the specific conditions of Bengali literary culture and Indian social history. It has not simply applied the methods of its founders without modification: it has engaged critically with those methods, developing and refining them in the light of specific analytical challenges and new theoretical resources. And it has not simply transmitted the tradition to new generations without challenging those generations to develop it further: it has created the conditions, through its teaching and its institutional work, for the kind of critical engagement that genuine intellectual inheritance requires.

This is the tradition that Abdul Kafi embodies and sustains, in his scholarship, in his teaching, in his institutional work, and in his practice of intellectual life under the specific pressures of his time and place. It is a tradition that has been forged in the specific conditions of Bengali intellectual history, shaped by the encounter of a rich literary culture with colonial capitalism, revolutionary politics, and the ongoing crisis of the postcolonial state. It is a tradition that has made genuine contributions to the global conversation about literature, culture, and human emancipation. And it is a tradition that faces genuine challenges in the current moment, challenges that require both intellectual renewal and political courage to address.

The assessment of Abdul Kafi's contribution to this tradition is, in the end, the assessment of a life's work conducted with seriousness, integrity, and commitment in the service of values that remain as important and as urgently needed as they have ever been. The study of that work, which this textbook has attempted, is itself a contribution to the tradition's ongoing development: an attempt to understand, to assess, and to transmit the resources that the tradition offers for the work of understanding and transforming the world.

The conversation continues.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR PART TEN

1. Evaluate the claim that the significance of an intellectual figure like Abdul Kafi cannot be adequately assessed by the criteria of the global academic mainstream. What alternative criteria does the Bengali Marxian tradition offer for evaluating intellectual achievement?

Are these criteria genuinely different from mainstream criteria, or are they simply modifications of the same underlying standards?

2. Analyze the concept of "immanent critique" as a method of literary analysis, and evaluate its application to the specific case of Raktakarobi. What specific insights does immanent critique of Tagore's play yield that other critical methods do not? What are the limitations of immanent critique as a method?
3. Examine the political economy of the Bengali progressive publishing industry and assess the challenges it faces in the neoliberal era. What specific institutional responses to these challenges are most likely to be effective? What forms of international solidarity could support the survival and development of vernacular progressive publishing?
4. Assess the relationship between the Bengali Marxian tradition and the Ambedkarite critique of caste. Is the classical Marxian framework, as practiced in the Bengali tradition, adequate for analyzing caste in the Indian context? What specific modifications to the framework are required to incorporate the insights of anti-caste thought without abandoning the Marxian commitment to the primacy of material conditions?
5. Evaluate the argument that the Bengali Marxian tradition has made specific and important contributions to the development of "Third World Marxism." What are the most significant of these contributions? What barriers have prevented their wider recognition in the global Marxian scholarly conversation?
6. Analyze Bourdieu's concept of academic capital and evaluate its relevance to the situation of vernacular scholars like Abdul Kafi within the global academic field. What specific mechanisms of the academic field reproduce the marginalization of vernacular scholarship? What institutional responses are most likely to be effective in challenging this marginalization?
7. Examine the concept of intellectual integrity under conditions of political pressure. What specific forms of pressure do scholars like Abdul Kafi face in the current Indian political context? What psychological, institutional, and intellectual resources are available for maintaining intellectual integrity under these conditions?
8. Assess the specific contribution of Dhumketu and Kazi Nazrul Islam to the development of the Bengali Marxian literary tradition. What is distinctive about Nazrul's synthesis of Islamic cultural tradition and Marxian political commitment? What implications does this synthesis have for the current challenge of building a genuinely inclusive Marxian cultural politics in contemporary India?
9. Evaluate the methodological toolkit for Bengali Marxian literary analysis proposed in the final chapter of Part Ten. What are the most important elements of this toolkit? What elements are missing that should be included? How does this toolkit compare with the methods of other forms of Marxian literary criticism?
10. Develop a comprehensive assessment of the prospects for the Bengali Marxian literary tradition over the next generation. What are the most important resources for renewal that the tradition possesses? What are the most significant obstacles to that renewal? What specific intellectual and institutional strategies would be most effective in addressing those obstacles?
11. Examine the relationship between the Bengali Marxian tradition and the global ecology movement. What specific resources does the tradition offer for the development of an ecological politics adequate to the Bengali situation? What modifications to the tradition's framework are required to incorporate ecological dimensions adequately?

12. Write a critical assessment of this textbook itself, evaluating the adequacy of its methods, the comprehensiveness of its coverage, the fairness of its assessments, and the value of its contribution to the study of Abdul Kafi and the Bengali Marxian tradition. What are the most important limitations of the textbook's approach? What would a better or more complete study look like?
-

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

On the assessment of intellectual contributions: Stefan Collini's "Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain" provides the most important recent model for the critical assessment of intellectual contributions in their historical context. Edward Said's "The World, the Text, and the Critic" provides the most important account of the relationship between intellectual work and political commitment from the postcolonial perspective. Julien Benda's "The Treason of the Intellectuals" provides a classic formulation of the problem of intellectual integrity that remains important even where one disagrees with Benda's specific conclusions.

On the political economy of publishing and intellectual production: Andre Schiffrin's "The Business of Books" provides a sharp analysis of the commercial transformation of publishing that is directly relevant to the challenges facing progressive publishers like the NBA. John B. Thompson's "Merchants of Culture" provides the most sociologically rigorous analysis of the contemporary publishing industry. Bourdieu's "The Rules of Art" provides the most important theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between cultural production and the social field within which it occurs.

On the methodology of Marxian literary criticism: Fredric Jameson's "The Political Unconscious" remains the most important and most comprehensive articulation of the Marxian literary critical method. Terry Eagleton's "Criticism and Ideology" provides the most important British Marxian account. Raymond Williams' "Marxism and Literature" provides the most readable and most balanced introduction to the Marxian theoretical framework for literary analysis.

On Kazi Nazrul Islam: Kazi Abdul Wadud's essays in Bengali provide the most important early critical assessment of Nazrul's work. Winston Langley's "Kazi Nazrul Islam: The Rebel Poet of Bengal" provides the most accessible English-language introduction. Sufia Ahmed's work on Nazrul's political context provides essential historical background.

On the relationship between Marxism and religious thought: Alistair Kee's "Marx and the Failure of Liberation Theology" provides a sharp but important critique. Cornel West's "The Cornel West Reader" provides the most important American example of the productive combination of Marxian and religious thought. Mehdi Amel's collected writings, available in Arabic, provide the most systematic Arab Marxian engagement with the question of religion and political commitment.

On Jadavpur University and the Bengali academic world: Sukanta Chaudhuri's edited volume on Jadavpur University's history provides essential institutional context. Sumit Sarkar's "Modern India" provides the most important historical background for understanding the development of Bengal's intellectual culture. Partha Chatterjee's "The Nation and Its Fragments" provides the most important theoretical account of the relationship between nationalism, colonialism, and the intellectual field in Bengal.

On the future of Marxian scholarship: Fredric Jameson's "Valences of the Dialectic" provides the most important recent assessment of where Marxian scholarship stands and where it needs to go. David Harvey's "Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism" provides a comprehensive survey of the contemporary crisis of capitalism from a Marxian perspective. Alain Badiou's "The Rebirth of History" provides an important, if controversial, assessment of the prospects for radical political transformation in the current period.

GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR THE COMPLETE TEXTBOOK

The following bibliography lists the major works cited or discussed across all ten parts of this textbook, organized by field and subject matter.

On Bengali literary history and criticism: Sukumar Sen's "History of Bengali Literature" remains the essential scholarly survey. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay's multi-volume history of Bengali literature provides the most comprehensive Bengali-language account. Meenakshi Mukherjee's "Realism and Reality" situates Bengali literature within the broader Indian context. Sisir Kumar Das's history of Indian literature in English provides essential comparative context.

On Tagore: Rabindranath Tagore's "The Home and the World," "Nationalism," "Creative Unity," and "The Religion of Man" are the essential primary texts in English. Amartya Sen's "The Argumentative Indian" provides the most important contemporary critical assessment. Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson's "Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man" provides the most accessible scholarly biography. Uma Das Gupta's work on Tagore's educational philosophy provides essential supplementary context.

On Marxian theory: Marx and Engels' "The Communist Manifesto," Marx's "Capital" (three volumes), Marx's "Grundrisse," Marx's "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," and Marx's "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844" are the essential primary texts. Engels' "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State" provides essential supplementary context.

On Gramsci: "Selections from the Prison Notebooks" remains the essential text. "Selections from Cultural Writings" provides essential supplementary material. Joseph Buttigieg's translation of the complete prison notebooks provides the most rigorous scholarly access to the full range of Gramsci's thought. Peter Thomas's "The Gramscian Moment" provides the most important recent scholarly assessment.

On the Indian Marxian tradition: M.N. Roy's "India in Transition" provides the most important early Indian Marxian analysis. E.M.S. Namboodiripad's "The National Question in Kerala" provides an important example of the application of Marxian analysis to specific Indian conditions. Bipan Chandra's "Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India" provides the most important Marxian historiography of Indian nationalism. Ranajit Guha's "Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India" provides the most important subaltern studies application to Indian history.

On postcolonial theory: Frantz Fanon's "The Wretched of the Earth" remains the foundational text. Edward Said's "Orientalism" provides the most important account of the discursive dimensions of colonial power. Homi Bhabha's "The Location of Culture" provides the most important poststructuralist postcolonial theory. Gayatri Spivak's "A Critique of Postcolonial Reason" provides the most important feminist postcolonial critique.

On the Subaltern Studies tradition: Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, editors, "Selected Subaltern Studies" provides the best introduction to the project. Dipesh Chakrabarty's "Provincializing Europe" provides the most important theoretical development of the subaltern studies framework in relation to European Marxian historiography.

APPENDIX: A NOTE ON SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this textbook has been described in the prefaces to individual parts, but it is worth summarizing here, in the concluding appendix, the specific approach that has been taken and its rationale.

The textbook combines biographical, historical, theoretical, comparative, and analytical approaches to the study of Abdul Kafi and the Bengali Marxian tradition. The biographical approach provides the human center of the study: the specific life and institutional career of a specific scholar, situated in a specific historical and institutional context. The historical approach situates that biographical center within the broader history of Bengali intellectual life, of Jadavpur University, of the Marxian tradition in India and globally, and of the political and social forces that have shaped the conditions of intellectual work over the past century. The theoretical approach engages with the major theoretical frameworks, from Marxian literary theory to feminist theory to postcolonial studies to the sociology of knowledge, that are relevant to the understanding of the tradition and of Abdul Kafi's specific contribution to it. The comparative approach situates the Bengali tradition within the broader landscape of global Marxian cultural thought, identifying both its distinctive features and its connections to parallel intellectual movements in other national and cultural contexts. And the analytical approach applies all of these frameworks to the specific texts and institutional practices that constitute the tradition's most important intellectual achievements.

The consistent aim throughout has been to be both rigorous and readable: to maintain the intellectual standards of serious scholarly analysis without sacrificing the qualities of engagement, clarity, and narrative momentum that make intellectual history genuinely interesting

rather than merely informative. We have tried to be honest about what we do not know, transparent about our own methodological choices and their implications, and genuinely open to the complexity and the contradictions of the tradition we are studying.

The ideal reader for this textbook is someone who brings to the reading a genuine intellectual curiosity about the questions at stake, a willingness to engage with complexity and contradiction, and a commitment to the belief that the serious study of intellectual life is itself a contribution to the human pursuit of understanding and justice that gives intellectual work its deepest significance.

S M Nazmuz Sakib is an interdisciplinary scholar, researcher and author bridging IT, business analytics, and applied research. He is a Fellow of the Scholars Academic and Scientific Society, a Member of IAENG, a lifetime member of BELTA, and a Bangladeshi Arena Grand Master (AGM) recognized by FIDE. His credentials include extensive certifications across AWS, Google/SAS analytics, UX, project management, digital marketing, and finance. Sakib has published several peer-reviewed articles and book chapters.

